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**THE MUSIC OF THE SABAOT:
BRIDGING TRADITIONAL
AND CHRISTIAN CONTEXTS**

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Ph.D.

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2002



The music of the Sabaot: bridging traditional and Christian contexts

Kenya has been in the throes of cultural transformation for several decades, and new concepts and values continue to permeate the lives of those within its many language groups. Yet so far there has been little critical study of the effects such a transformation is having on the older forms of music within the country. On the basis that a genre of music can share structural and semantic features with the language to which it is closest in origin, this thesis looks at the Sabaot people, many of whom prefer to use their mother tongue but are divided as to the future of their traditional music.

The nature, motivations and consequences of their present day music use are drawn from ethnographic source material collected during personal field research amongst the Sabaot. After a broad overview of the physical, historical and social contexts, the traditional musical instruments of these people are documented in depth, along with a typology of older song forms and some of the ceremonies with which they are associated. Recent music styles and instruments are also covered, particularly those found in Christian churches of the Sabaot area. Both traditional and contemporary song texts are examined for features of stanza construction and vocal-linguistic tonal relationships, and examples of songs referred to in the text are included in transcription and audio format.

Throughout this thesis, dynamics of change are examined wherever possible from the perspective of the Sabaot. The theoretical framework is drawn from existing ethnomusicological writing on change mechanisms, and includes correlations with relevant language-shift theories. In order to establish which emic genre features are unique to Sabaot traditional songs, chapter eight contains an analysis of various structural aspects such as mode, intervallic syntax and melodic phrasing. A series of 'awareness workshops' amongst local musicians has then enabled the consideration and testing of these features for relevance in other social and musical contexts,

particularly that of the African Christian church. The results demonstrate that alternative styles of musical expression do not have to progress at the expense of older musical traditions, and are important findings for those ethnic communities that believe their earlier music or instruments are unsuitable for development in settings such as the church. In addition to ethnographic research on the Sabaot, this work also contributes a better understanding within the field of ethnomusicology of links between language and music shift.

SPONSOR

Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL), East Africa

AFFILIATING INSTITUTION

Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Dedicated to Sabaot friends,

"kōōnkoy miisin lēyyē!"

Tewerer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	iv
Illustrations and maps	ix
Charts and tables	ix
Notes on the text	
(i) Choice of font and vowel markings	x
(ii) Conventions of orthography and spelling	x
(iii) Abbreviations / acronyms used in the text	xi
(iv) Symbols used in song transcriptions	xii
 1. Theoretical framework and methodology	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research context	5
1.3 Ethical considerations relating to the role of the researcher	12
1.4 Literature Review	14
1.5 Objectives and hypotheses	23
1.5.1 Assumptions	25
1.6 Methodology	27
1.6.1 Data selection and limitations	27
1.6.2 Data-gathering fieldwork	29
1.6.3 Data analysis	33
1.6.4 Data-evaluation workshops	35
 2. Context	
2.1 Introduction	41
2.2 Geography and demography	41
2.3 Ethnic origins	46
2.4 The Mount Elgon <i>Mosoobiisyēk</i>	49
2.5 Exploration and migration patterns on Mount Elgon, 19th century onwards	52
2.5.1 Land policies affecting the Sabaot	53

2.6	Languages used on Mount Elgon	58
2.6.1	Sabaot and related dialects	59
2.6.2	Swahili	62
2.6.3	English	62
2.7	Economy and subsistence patterns of the Sabaot	63
2.8	Education and literacy development amongst the Sabaot	66
2.9	Sabaot social and political structures	69
2.9.1	Traditional social structure	70
2.9.2	Social issues	77
2.9.3	Political administration	78
2.10	Traditional beliefs and the influence of the Church in the Sabaot region	79

3. Sabaot traditional instruments

3.1	Sabaot traditional instruments	85
3.2	The <i>bukantiit</i>	85
3.2.1	History of the <i>bukantiit</i>	85
3.2.2	Classification	88
3.2.3	Construction	90
3.2.4	Purpose / symbolism / social value	97
3.2.5	Tuning	101
3.2.6	Characteristics of performance style and manner of playing	104
3.3	Other traditional sound instruments	111
3.3.1	Chordophones	111
3.3.2	Idiophones	113
3.3.3	Membranophones	116
3.3.4	Aerophones	118

4. A survey of genres in the corpus of Sabaot traditional song

4.1	The Sabaot conception of music and performance	121
4.2	The role of music amongst the Sabaot	127
4.3	The importance of dance	129
4.4	Traditional song genres in their cultural setting	132
4.4.1	Choices in typology classification	132
4.4.2	Life-cycle rituals that incorporate song	135
4.4.2.1	<i>Tyēēntaab leekook</i> (circumcision / clitoridectomy songs)	135
4.4.2.2	Closing ceremonies: <i>mēliilto</i> and <i>ng'ētunyto</i>	146
4.4.2.3	Marriage and house-entering songs: <i>tyēēnwookikaab kēēsyēet</i> (better known as <i>sōōsyoo</i>)	147
4.4.2.4	Birth songs (twins): <i>tyēēntaab saramēek</i>	150
4.4.2.5	Life-cycle rituals in which song is optional	152
4.4.3	Non-ritual use of song	153
4.4.3.1	Warrior songs: <i>tyēēnwookikaab lukēēntaab booryēēt</i>	153
4.4.3.2	Work songs: <i>tyēēnwookikaab yiisyēēt</i>	155

4.4.3.3	Lullabies: <i>tyēēnto nyēē /kēēsooysooyēē keekwēēt</i>	156
4.4.3.4	Young (uninitiated) people's songs: <i>tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk</i>	156
4.4.3.5	Songs of the past (history, <i>aroosyek</i> and creation)	157
4.4.3.6	Entertainment songs: <i>tyēēnwookikaab ng'asyaneet</i>	159
4.4.4	Other traditional practices	162
5.	External influences on Sabaot music	
5.1	Choices in the East African contemporary music scene	167
5.1.1	Popular music in Kenya	168
5.1.2	'Traditional mix'	172
5.2	The impact of media	175
5.3	Musical instruments and dance re-examined	178
5.4	The influence of the church	182
5.5	Current Sabaot musical preferences	183
6.	Culture response	
6.1	Introduction	187
6.2	The epistemology of change	191
6.2.1	Causes of resistance and rejection	195
6.2.2	The impact of associative links	199
6.3	Language shift theories and models of music change	201
6.4	Contextualisation issues	210
6.5	Sabaot attitudes towards music and change	214
7.	Linguistic parallels	
7.1	Language and music: a partnership confused	223
7.2	Properties of the Sabaot language	228
7.3	A closer examination of traditional song texts	232
7.3.1	Vocal-linguistic tone relationship	242
7.3.2	Syllable stress, vowels and rhythm	246
8.	Comparative analysis of Sabaot music	
8.1	Traditional musical forms	251
8.1.1	Tonal structure	251
8.1.1.1	Emic analysis	260
8.1.1.2	Range of pitches	267
8.1.1.3	Melodic contour	268
8.1.2	Phraseology and form	274
8.1.3	Rhythm	279
8.2	Church music on Mount Elgon	284
8.2.1	The songs of Patrick Mang'esoy	284
8.2.2	Hymns and choruses	286

8.3	Testing of concepts and analysis	288
8.3.1	Workshop findings	292
9.	Conclusions	
9.1	Findings	299
9.2	Present responses	305
9.2.1	Future choices	310
9.3	Epilogue	315
 Appendices		
I	People who assisted in interviews and performances	319
II	Song transcriptions	329
III	Contents of accompanying CD	419
IV	Song workshops: locations, dates and statistics	427
V	Some Sabaot marriage customs	429
 Glossary		433
 Bibliography		
	Bibliographic abbreviations	443
	Books and journals	443
	Hymnals	464
	Maps	464
 Discography		465

ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

Plate 1a:	Stanley Ndiema and Patrick Mang'esoy	30
Plate 2a:	Kenya and Mount Elgon in relation to East Africa	38
Plate 2b:	Mount Elgon: districts, towns and villages on the Kenya side	39
Plate 2c:	Sabaot and neighbouring language groups	40
Plate 2d:	Sabaot conical house	42
Plate 2e:	Upper moorland, former home of <i>Mosoobiisyēk</i>	43
Plate 2f:	<i>Mosoobiisyēk</i> women wearing <i>sērēkoonik</i>	51
Plate 2g:	Dialects of the Sabaot language	60
Plate 2i:	Typical layout within a <i>bōrōryēēt</i>	72
Plate 3a:	Dimensions and features of the <i>bukantiit</i>	91
Plate 3b:	Recent frame construction of a <i>bukantiit</i>	93
Plate 3c:	A recent instrument with plywood resonator, steel strings and tuning mechanism	94
Plate 3d:	Ornamented <i>bukantiit</i>	94
Plate 3e:	Numbering of strings on <i>bukantiit</i> , showing parts named after the human body	95
Plate 3f:	Mutios brothers in consort	106
Plate 3g:	Traditional manner of plucking	107
Plate 3h:	Kisinja demonstrating strumming technique	109
Plate 3i:	Another manner of strumming	109
Plate 3j:	<i>Kibtiilteet</i>	112
Plate 3k:	Traditional <i>ntēkwēyiinēk</i>	113
Plate 3m:	<i>Bucheencheyinēk</i>	114
Plate 3n:	Close-up of a <i>bucheencheyiit</i> showing bottle tops pounded flat	114
Plate 3p:	<i>Kiiraanchiinek</i> in top left-hand corner next to the <i>neembeyit</i>	115
Plate 3r:	<i>Neembeyit</i>	117
Plate 3s:	<i>Kiriinkoonik</i>	117
Plate 3t:	<i>Aryeembuut</i>	119
Plate 4a:	Mixed group of circumcision candidates, Kobsiio	137
Plate 4b:	<i>Chōōlyēēt</i> ceremony. The tobacco bowl is on the right	143
Plate 5a:	Duo of <i>bukantiit</i> (Silas Kiprop) and guitar (Joseph Morongo)	179
Plate 6a:	Kororio Arab Chesabir	220

CHARTS AND TABLES

Chart 2h:	The traditional social structure of the Sabaot	70
Table 2j:	Sabaot age-set groups	74
Table 4a:	Sabaot terms relating to music and dance	122
Table 4b:	English/Sabaot equivalents relating to music	123
Table 4c:	Sabaot terms relating to use of the voice	124
Table 4d:	Sabaot terms specific to the <i>bukantiit</i>	125
Table 4e:	Sabaot terms relating to instrumental performance and tuning	125

NOTES ON THE TEXT

(i) Choice of font and vowel markings

Certain words in the Sabaot language require special characters. For example, when 'heavy' vowels occur, these are marked with a line over the letter as in *bēēko* (water). I have used italics for all Sabaot words with the exception of people's names and words in common cartographic use. English meaning equivalents have been given on first use, and those which are referred to in subsequent text are also included in the glossary.

(ii) Conventions of orthography and spelling

Orthography and consequent spelling were established between the years of 1981-1984 by the Sabaot Language and Literature Committee, with the help of linguists Iver Larsen and Fred Surai. The committee comprised administrators, school teachers and other Sabaot mother-tongue speakers having secondary or tertiary education. In selecting the orthography, many symbols could be matched with those of the Swahili alphabet. However, the Sabaot language has grammatical tone, fewer consonants than Swahili and four times as many vowels, so there are important differences necessitated between the two orthographies.

An earlier form of orthography existed prior to the more recent version, and variations of spelling remain, particularly with place and family names. The proximity of Swahili language speakers has meant that certain place-names such as *Kimēliil*, *Kibchōōr* and *Chēēbtayiis* retain the Swahili orthography on some maps and signs but are more commonly known today as Kimilili, Kibichori and Cheptais. Sabaot itself is more correctly written as *Sābāwōōt* in the revised orthography, but the commonised version is used by Sabaot scholars when the bulk of the text is in English. People now choose to spell their names as they wish, and also choose whether they wish to be referred to by their Sabaot family name, traditional name or a western name. For example, the musician Benjamin Chemosit was nicknamed 'Kissinger' after playing to the American statesman. Such a name can also be spelt Kiisinja or Kisinja, and by his own personal preference, the latter is used in this thesis.

The Sabaot language has several dialects, and over the years some confusion has arisen concerning the spelling variants of these in historical and linguistic sources. For example, the *Mosoob* dialect is variously found as *Musop*, *Masob* or *Māsāāb*; the *Sōmēēk* as *Somek*; and *Book* is sometimes spelt as *Pok* or *Bok*. The spellings used in this thesis match those adopted in BTL Sabaot publications.

There are some points of phonological interest that affect spelling. There is now no written *d* in the Sabaot orthography, *t* being used instead. Likewise, *p* is replaced with *b*. There is also one trigraph that corresponds to Swahili orthography, namely *ng'*.

I use double quotation marks for sections of text that are either direct speech or quotations taken from another author.

(iii) Abbreviations / acronyms used in the text

Abbreviations related to bibliographic materials are listed in the bibliography itself.

A	augmented interval (as in A4L, or augmented 4ths below tonal centre)
ACK	Anglican Church of Kenya, formerly known as CPK
AD.	Anno Domini
AIM	Africa Inland Church
ATR	advanced tongue root
BC.	Before Christ
BTL	Bible Translation and Literacy, East Africa
CD	compact disc
cf.	compare
D	diminished interval (as in D4H, or diminished 4th above tonal centre)
ditto	that which has been said before
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
EA	East Africa
excl.	exclamation
f; ff.	following page(s) or bars of music
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
H	high tone (linguistic)
H	higher (as in M3H, or major 3rd above tonal centre)
<i>ibid</i>	referring to a book already cited
It.	Italian
Japn.	Japanese
K.A.N.U.	Kenya African National Union
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Authority
L	low tone (linguistic)
L	lower (as in M3L, or major 3rd below tonal centre). The distinction between these should be clear in context
Lat.	Latin
lit.	literal meaning
M	medium tone (linguistic)
M	major interval (music)
m	minor interval
MM.	metronome mark
MPRSK	Musicians' Performing Rights Society of Kenya
n.	noun
NGDMI	New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments
NIV	New International Version, an English translation of the Bible completed in 1978
P	perfect interval
Sab.	Sabaot
SATB	four-part choral singing using soprano, alto, tenor, bass
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention

SBTL	Sabaot Bible Translation and Literacy
SIL	SIL International (formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics)
sim.	continues in a similar manner
TC	Tonal Centre
UBS	United Bible Society
UN	United Nations
v	verb
vi	intransitive verb, a verb that takes no object
vt.	transitive verb, a verb that takes a direct object

(iv) Symbols used in song transcriptions

↓	pitch is lowered
)	extended breath point in song
[]	brackets enclosing etic interval (in one instance, denotes notes missing on recording)
//	brackets enclosing emic interval
↘	slide or portamento between two notes
~~~~	extended shake on <i>chuukaasiit</i> (similar to tambourine)

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## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

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"Although we are still Sabaot, we have gone out of tune".

Christopher Kiplang'at¹

### 1.1 Introduction

Like many post-colonial African countries today, the peoples of Kenya are experiencing considerable pressure in the arena of cultural expression. The causality and outcome of this has been studied by various scholars over the years, but little critical thought has been given either to the impact on ceremonial musics or the systematic documentation of the cultures being transformed. That which does exist is inaccessible to the majority of Kenyans and also represents an information model that is unfamiliar to many.

Choosing a people group for such a project has been dependent on accessibility, on the willingness of the people to take part, and on the existence of supporting factors such as contacts in the area. One group that has met all three prerequisites is the Sabaot, the majority of whose members live on and around Mount Elgon. This mountain straddles the Kenya/Uganda border and is geographically divided into several levels, each of which has significance in the livelihood and history of the Sabaot. These levels have also allowed for a degree of comparative research, whilst the height of the mountain has served as a partial filter of ethnic influences emanating from the surrounding lowland areas.

As with most groups in Kenya, the Sabaot are proud of their ethnic identity, their homeland and their way of life. They also see the advantages of many changes creeping up the mountain. For some, progress is eminently desirable, others such as the highland or *Mosoobiisyēk* dwellers amongst the Sabaot are more cautious. Yet, despite maintaining a number of their ceremonial customs, the *Mosoobiisyēk* are now largely integrated with the other Sabaot dialect groups, and there are signs that Mair's prediction (1957:52) is valid:

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¹ Taken from an interview on Mount Elgon, September 1997.

"The conservative force of tradition is never proof against the attraction of economic advantage, provided that the advantage is sufficient and is clearly recognised".

In order to understand the ongoing development of music amongst the Sabaot, neither the considerable growth in churches on Mount Elgon nor the varieties of dance and instrumental styles prevailing in urban settings across East Africa can be ignored. As a result of their influence, Sabaot society is searching for a new face. Yet music continues to constitute an important community bond for them, from being an integral part of many of the ceremonies that mark a person's transition through life to symbolising membership of a new system of beliefs in the church.

Ethnomusicologists such as Nketia (1957:13) and Wachsmann (1953:56) have previously expressed concern as to whether African music can survive the influences of other music genres. Change and differentiation are endemic to music, but if there is no parallel instinct for survival, the music is likely to pass into disuse (Nketia, *ibid.*:91-92). To understand this better means studying the cultural disposition and environment of the people concerned and seeing if this gives any clues as to likely music response.

This broader picture is sometimes referred to as the state of primary being or the traditions people hold to. The anthropologist Julian Steward (1967:22) defines 'traditional' as "the characteristics of the native society or state that existed before modernising influences began to transform it". This is much the Sabaot understanding when they refer to 'the songs / dances of old days or days of our fathers'. However, they are also learning that tradition must be divided from life now, necessitating a choice between old and new that has been strongly reinforced by the arrival of Christianity in Africa. A believer's conversion equates to leaving worldly or traditional ways,² a teaching that has been reflected in the attitudes of many missionaries towards cultural aspects of which they have had inadequate comprehension.

With Steward's definition it is difficult to avoid a stereotyped implication of Africa's lack of progression or cultural stagnancy prior to 'modernising' taking place. There is also the inherent conception in the western world that Africa's subsequent

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² Encapsulated in the verse: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV).



development must involve cultural transformation, or moving towards a more developed, improved state. Comparisons with the perceived universal validity of the western cultural status have symbolised much of early colonialist efforts, as shown in their frequent references to primitive music,³ fetishes and cultural 'oddities'. To be fair, this was acceptable descriptive practice worldwide, such as in Béla Bartók's references to 'primitive melodies' and 'peculiar scales',⁴ but the implication in all cases denoted the lowest place in the hierarchy of music development (Steszewski, 1991:378). Evolutionist perspectives in comparative ethnomusicology abounded in the 19th / early 20th century, with five and six tone scales commonly described as 'narrow-range' and again having connotations of simplistic or obsolete value.

The viewpoint in this writing is not that the concept of tradition is limited in time and state, but that change and its causes are inseparable from the natural progression of community structure. Ranger (1983) and Erlmann (1991) describe this as new practices built on existing elements in a selective manner, establishing continuity with that which already exists. Kubik (1987:2) likewise places traditional music as a category within a larger concept of musical traditions, each subject to periods of varying stability and flux. This implies an ongoing process rather than a point of conversion or departure, "a practice handed down; the continuous development of a body of music".⁵ Kubik concludes (1994:21) that "the notion of African music as historically static has been abandoned", echoing the words of A.L. Lloyd twenty five years earlier:

"Too often we think of folk traditions as being like 'constant marble stone', changing very slowly, if at all, under the snailbite of erosion rather than through any sharply-defined action of history. If that is the view from the library, experience in the field teaches otherwise... A living tradition is not a stone column but a plant, hardy but sensitive to climate change".⁶

This dichotomy in the defining of tradition has led to another commonly held belief that the ways of culture are naturally inclined to be self-sustaining. In Kenya, the consequence of what is proving to be a false sense of security over the survival of traditional song forms is the rapid need for caretaking. This is particularly applicable

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³ Browne, 1925:167.

⁴ Demény, 1971:122-123. *Bartók's* comments made during fieldwork in Biskra, Algeria, 1913.

⁵ Chambers Dictionary, 1977.

⁶ Lloyd, 1967:173, footnote. English ethnomusicologist and folk singer.

to cultures that have until recently depended upon oral presentation and have nothing concrete to consult once their traditions have slipped into disuse.

The present study of Sabaot music became possible under the auspices of a Kenyan non-governmental organisation known as BTL,⁷ which undertakes translation of the Bible into vernacular languages of minority people groups. Before long-term linguistic and literacy projects such as theirs can begin, the various components of language use are surveyed for long-term viability, particularly in areas where use of the national language is on the increase. If language-shift is present to a significant extent, then it needs to be assessed whether a language of 'wider communication' such as Swahili is likely to become a substitute for the vernacular in the near future.

In 1994 whilst on a music survey of the Mount Elgon region, I became aware that similar value shifts were taking place with reference to the traditional music of the Sabaot, the implications of which were likely to be shared by other ethnic groups in Kenya. I realised I had the ideal doorway by which to investigate the networking and implications of language, music and societal values, in particular to engage better in debate on the correlation of existing language shift theories with musical change.

The results of this investigation begin with a broad overview of the physical, historical and social contexts of Sabaot life today. From this emerges a genre-based analysis of traditional music forms and instruments contrasted with more recent art forms, with both groupings linked by the undercurrent of change. Another major aspect without which this research would be incomplete is a comparative analysis of the various music systems used by the Sabaot, in particular those features which distinguish traditional from contemporary. Consideration is given to whether these components can be viable when relocated from one context to another, to the implications of current music-making practices continuing amongst the Sabaot, and to the ethical challenges facing those who play any part in this.

In this first chapter, specific consideration is given to outlining the author's interests and concerns that have prompted this research, as well as defining the basis upon which theoretical and analytical aspects are formed. It is also necessary to

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⁷ Bible Translation and Literacy, East Africa. The Sabaot project is referred to as SBTL.



explain the variety of methodology that have been used for collecting, selecting and then disseminating the content of this thesis.

## 1.2 Research context

There will be many contrasts made in these pages between the older or traditional music of the Sabaot and more recent categorisations of music. The first is that the majority of traditional songs collected in this instance deal with human experiences outside the sphere of religion, whereas a significant part of recent genres are specifically designed for church use. Other music styles such as those introduced by dance bands are also influential, but to a lesser degree at this point in time. The church repertoire includes hymns and a shorter worship song style that is commonly known in church settings as a 'chorus',⁸ and subsequent discussion is on the understanding that descriptions such as traditional, recent, hymn and chorus are not intended to imply any ranking or status.

Although this section is entitled 'research context', it is more correctly an outlining of factors that require investigation if the present musical response of the Sabaot is to be better understood. Where necessary, this is extended to Kenya itself. Beginning with the Sabaot situation, there are clear signs that, faced with the addition of other musics to their daily life, something is happening to the first.⁹ The most obvious symptom is that their traditional musical expression is atrophying, and the instruments associated with such songs are being marginalised. The contributing factors form an important part of this research, as the Sabaot people possess a small yet unique repertoire of traditional songs and instruments that are not used by any other people group. Nketia (1998:49) notes that the majority of African research conducted by western scholars to date has focused on organology, and suggests that in light of the transitions in music mentioned above, it is time the focus turned more to applied ethnomusicology and theoretical critique. Hence the first of many reasons for this research.

Most people living in America, Europe or the Far East have never heard of Sabaot music, and would fail to notice its demise. Even within Africa itself, the rate

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⁸ These terms are used by the Sabaot.

⁹ A theory first proposed by Nettl, 1985:20.

of attrition within many traditional music systems passes with little comment. Languages fare no better, and although the Ethnologue (Grimes, 2000) lists forty-nine African languages as nearly extinct, many political and educational institutions believe it is more important to have a single language of communication than to promote cultural, linguistic and musical diversity.

Compounding the incidence of atrophy is that the musical guardians amongst the Sabaot have always been elders. Not surprisingly, these also have the weakest literacy skills, hence creating a written record of musical practices is not yet a feasible option for those who are its champions. They lament their weakening memories, the confusion that is now evident over dates and genealogies, and the weakening of traditional community ways of transmitting knowledge to subsequent generations. They are also acutely aware that ways in which they expressed themselves musically in the past are losing validity and relevance amongst the younger generations.

It is also important to remember that every Sabaot retains an element of protectiveness towards their ethnic distinctiveness, sharpened in recent times by the tribal clashes over land rights. "Due to the political stresses between ourselves and the Bantu, we feel we must remain a different people in all social values except the areas of education and Christianity".¹⁰ It is strange then, that whereas other African groups recognise the Sabaot lyre or *bukantiit* to be specific to the Sabaot, this distinctiveness is little spoken of by the Sabaot themselves. Neither is there much outward interest shown in recognising the uniqueness of their traditional repertoire in comparison with the traditional genres of other African groups.

It is possible this lack of interest in 'identity' stems from the wider attitude of the country itself. Kenya is home to a large number of ethnic groups, each of which has its own mother tongue and special customs. The arts scene is equally diverse, and no single dominant identity has yet emerged or been chosen to represent Kenya to the outside world. There is a national language (Swahili), but there are still people in Kenya who cannot speak this. For many years, fashion designers have urged Kenyans to come up with a 'national dress' that could be used as a cultural marketing image, but it has proved impossible to decide a common representative of all.

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¹⁰ Patrick Mang'esoy, personal communication, 7 October 2001.

Likewise in music, there is no clearly identifiable style that is marketable as 'Kenyan', and instead it is the names of popular performers that are remembered more than the actual styles they use.

There is one exception to this lack of an identity trait. Many of the participants in this research have some form of church involvement, and are familiar with the popular chorus style. What they are not necessarily aware of is that this same chorus style is common to many other areas of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. If it were not for the different languages used for the texts, it would be hard to tell the region a chorus came from.¹¹

The first impression of the Sabaot people is that they are accepting of life and keen to make the best of everything they have. However, in the search to unearth cultural attitudes, this research has uncovered many stifled emotions, particularly concerning the future. Uncertainty, despair and optimism have all been evident, but even stronger has been the longing evident amongst all age groups for unity to continue in their midst. Their concern for this is such that they see their livelihoods, location, language and clan structures as sources of unification rather than symbols of identity. The idea of having a way of life that distinguishes them from other African groups appears to be relatively insignificant.

In neighbouring Tanzania, Nyerere's 'agrarian socialism' is considered by some to have been a brave and honest effort to create Utopia by crossing rural Africa's social traditions with Christian ethics. Social engineering of this sort is mentioned here only in that it restored the self-respect of Tanzanians by emphasising the value of African social traditions and their relevance for the future.¹² The situation in neighbouring Kenya has less of the self-respect and more of an addiction to western world-view, but as pointed out by Nettl in his book *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation and Survival* (1985:13-16), the musical blinkers resulting from such addiction are slowly coming off. There are now tentative signs that both the media industry and exponents of traditional musics are beginning to seek alternatives.

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¹¹ Examples of such songs can be heard on CD:31 and 33.

¹² Murphy, 1993:159.

It is my estimation that the future of indigenous music making amongst the Sabaot is in some jeopardy. The UNESCO yardstick for an endangered language (Wurm, 1996:2) is thirty percent or less children learning it, and if such a basis is applied to Sabaot traditional music, I would estimate it too is in endangered territory. Culture can have many natures: it can be tenacious and inflexible, or it can be absorbing and adaptable. Many years back, Merriam expressed confidence that traditional patterns in Africa would not be consumed by the impact of outside cultures (1959(i):84), but this must surely assume a conscious decision on the part of the owners to avoid consumption. Reinvestigating the components of this will be another reason for this research.

Nketia (1998:17) attributes the reluctance of Africans to take their own heritage seriously to two deep-seated factors. The distrust shown by early missionaries towards Africa's traditional arts has left many indigenous people with a similar prejudice against their own music and dance. Secondly, colonial educators saw education as a tool of social change, which meant that progressive westernisation was promoted in place of 'pagan or undeveloped' African ways. It is painfully obvious from a historical perspective that those who came to Africa had agendas other than exploring the cultures of Kenya, and traditional arts fell far from grace. The one exception was the inauguration of the annual Kenya Music and Drama Festival for Educational Institutions, although initially most of the classes in this were for performances of European sacred and secular arts.

When independence came in 1963, the reins were taken by a generation of Kenyans reeling from culture clash, raised on European literature and alienated from their own traditions. Carrington (1948:201-5) had already observed elsewhere on the continent that "Africans trained in European ways often object to the use of African music, feeling that the assimilation of European music should accompany the assimilation of other European patterns of behaviour". Nonetheless, the Kenyan Ministry of Culture was given freedom to encourage indigenous artistic expression in the land, and a traditional Pokomo melody was chosen for the Kenyan national anthem.

It was not until the late 1960s that interest began to re-awaken in traditional arts. Ironically this came through the desire for innovation in the Schools Festival

when the diet of Shakespeare began to adapt to African settings. Soon after, the use of Swahili instead of English was allowed, and in 1971, a play in the Maasai language was pronounced overall winner. For the next ten years, the popularity of African drama, music and art grew rapidly, feeding on an exposé of social and political life.

The shock in the early 1980s came when such freedoms were deemed too uncomfortable in certain circles. Restrictions were introduced in the Schools Festival on types of costume, and items that aroused violent feelings or depicted conflict were banned. Over the next decade, the situation fluctuated between periods of tension and relaxation, and drama and arts did not begin to gather strength again until the 1990s. On the 28th December 1998, the Minister of Culture made a public statement, saying, "Culture is important to maintain, but only that which is positive and in line with ongoing changes".¹³ Presumably he too had read Rosberg's paper on political conflict in Kenya (1958:113) in which 'tribal parochialism' was identified as restrictive of effective national efforts.

For similar reasons, Kenyan vernacular radio stations are closely monitored in case they promote "tribal chauvinism and undermine national cohesion".¹⁴ When the President of Kenya announces that "private [radio] stations must use English or Swahili to foster national unity", then every form of indigenous expression pauses for breath. Nketia (1991:83) prefers to view multi-ethnicities as an "aggregate of complementary rather than competing forms", but this is clearly difficult to realise.

Geertz (1973:150) has a more encouraging perspective on social conflict in general, describing it as "not simply indicative of a loss of cultural consensus, but rather... indicative of a search for new, more generalised and flexible patterns of belief and value". In larger-scale format across Africa, this search has been the ethos of pan-Africanism, with nations seeking cultural ties and a unified means of expression, and many festivals springing up in the 1970s to affirm the wider validity of African cultural experiences. Although as said earlier, the blinkers are coming off and the wider world is showing increasing interest in exploring African musical idioms, local Kenyan musicians need reassurance if they are to believe once again

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¹³ This was reported on Kenyan national television.

¹⁴ Reported in a public speech by President Daniel arap Moi, *Daily Nation*, 1 September 2000.



that their own music has any significant worth. A sign of this insecurity is that performing groups originating from West and Central Africa attract greater crowds in Kenya than local musicians.

It is no longer true to say that music is the most neglected of African arts.¹⁵ Within Kenya, artistic endeavours have included the building of the *Bomas of Kenya* by the Government in 1971, to "preserve, maintain and promote the rich and diverse cultural values of the various ethnic groups of Kenya... to preserve the authenticity of Kenya's cultural values, and to portray them in the most pure form".¹⁶ Another move came in 1988 when the Schools Festival was expanded to include non-educational institutions and clubs.

The curriculum for primary school music now gives equal emphasis to western and traditional music, but beyond school, indigenous songs, dramas and other artistic endeavours become a dim memory for most. Amongst the Sabaot, the number of people able to play the *bukantiit* lyre is ever diminishing, but it is the wider national trend that has prompted Warnock (1983:41) to write: "today we have a vast majority of Africans who have not the slightest idea of their own music and culture". On occasions of national patriotic celebration, military brass bands play non-Kenyan repertoire, whilst the hotel and tourist industry provide a sporadic source of income for the handful of professional traditional performing groups. I am reminded of some nineteenth-century African carvers who produced highly distorted body images because of a willing market, and the same is happening in many 'traditional dances' performed for tourists, where certain movements are now crudely distorted in a manner that would be distasteful to their originators.

On Mount Elgon, many younger-generation Sabaot are now opting out of rites-of-passage ceremonies and see no reason to foster their continuance in any form. Whereas many of the older musicians drew their early inspiration from listening to previous generations playing the *bukantiit*, this practice is now less common. Formerly, "the old men knew virtually everything there was to know in an unchanging cultural environment",¹⁷ and the younger Sabaot held them in great respect. Now there are signs of impatience, the educated want to be heard, and the

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¹⁵ Caluza, 1931:152.

¹⁶ Statement in publicity material, February 2002.

¹⁷ Manners, 1967:261.

pace of change is bewildering. Issues that were once seen as passing novelties are suddenly taking root and many, both young and old, are not prepared for the implications. Kavyû (1998:628) makes a comment of Kenya that "since developmental aid is mainly technological, the population is gradually changing from traditionally based to technologically based entertainment". This has a long way to go before being realised on Mount Elgon, but the seeds of desire have clearly been sown.

As well as technology, another determinant of cultural relevancy amongst the Sabaot is the church. Church growth has been rapid in the last thirty years, and most Sabaot villages now have several denominations. Choruses and hymns predominate in all locations as local churches feel they are expected to develop their musical worship in a manner that reflects their denomination nationwide. This is creating opposing camps of traditional and church values, and the possibility of church styles overpowering traditional Sabaot music is clearly evident as few Sabaot musicians feel able to counter the negatives that churches assign to traditional genres.

Another factor relating to churches is language use. Depending on the location of the church, congregational ethnicity may be increasingly mixed, and mindful of the one lost sheep being more important than the other ninety-nine,¹⁸ pastors consider it important to conduct their services in a language that visitors will understand, usually Swahili. Comprehension levels amongst regular attendants are not necessarily considered, and this mix of languages in the church together with 'different' worship styles is seen by many Sabaot as just another part of the Christian 'way of doing things' and therefore seldom questioned.

It is possible that someday the Sabaot will decide to juxtapose the old and new in a manner that is culturally meaningful and where one does not stifle the other. Nettl (1978(ii):123-136) gives three options for a musical tradition when faced with encroachment: substitution by the newer form, survival in new circumstances, or merging with the incoming music into a hybrid form. Where the Sabaot are heading is still undecided. The traditional *bukantiit* players lament "our strings are growing cold" as they consider the increasing neglect of their instrument and the substitution of guitars. "This new music now appears to be part of the Sabaot way of life. All are

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¹⁸ Gospel of Matthew, 18:12-14.

copying it, but we need to try and keep our older music".¹⁹ Unfortunately, there is little evidence of action and it is hoped that investigation of the problems outlined here will clarify options that can in turn be available to other groups evidencing similar difficulties.

### 1.3 Ethical considerations relating to the role of the researcher

This project represents the potential clash of interests between terms of employment and the need for impartial research; hence the boundaries and ethical issues require some definition. Part of my remit under SIL is encouraging minority language groups to consider whether the combining of their traditional music and mother tongue deepens their identification with Scripture. The fact that I undertake such a role means that I believe such identification *is* valid, and hence impartiality is difficult. Although missionaries have questioned the wisdom of my attending traditional secular events, many Sabaot still see such customs as a natural extension of their spoken and unspoken beliefs and have allowed me access to the most personal of ceremonies.

In my research activities amongst the Sabaot I have endeavoured to remain a participant observer rather than influence any outcomes, but accusations of manipulation and bias towards preservation of traditions are still likely to be made. It is difficult for any researcher not to make comparisons with what is already known and thereby colour their objectivity,²⁰ and it is not surprising that Nketia (1998:57-58) objects to the eurocentrism he detects in ethnomusicologists studying African music.

I have no desire for the Sabaot to remain isolated, preserved, static in time, holding onto the ways of their forefathers or suppressing any natural desires to change. Preservation is for dried insects in display cases. Worse, in a country already sensitised through colonial rule, it can be construed as either a form of cultural restraint or interference. Ethnographic enquiry is essential for mapping out cultural

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¹⁹ Quote of Kisinja, a skilled *bukantiit* player.

²⁰ Further concerns are voiced by Titon, 1997:208.



foundations, but there is little value in freezing music to a single point in time when the majority of Sabaot are eager to move on, to try new things.²¹

This does not remove the obstacle-course that every ethnomusicologist must negotiate between observation, preservation and interaction. It *does* acknowledge that choices should be made by the Sabaot themselves, and that this research is at their request.²² However, balancing the issues of being pro-active yet not exerting undue influence is far easier to write than to put into practice, and I have found there is an inherent expectation when I appear amongst musicians that I have come to teach them 'new' ideas. Whilst recognising that the role of the applied ethnomusicologist is one that must invariably be pro-active and have impact, a deliberate attempt has been made to promote community involvement in the hope that this will leave the Sabaot with self-generating ideas by which to continue exploring their traditions in new contexts. This is why I prefer the workshop format as it places everyone present on an equal learning basis and creates an environment for discussion and self-evaluation rather than a place where people come to be talked *at*.

As Robertson points out in her article "The Ethnomusicologist as Midwife" (1991:362), the manner in which we bring traditions into the light may determine both their survival and their acceptance. Making assumptions of musical significance may result in a new direction, the closure of further thought, or the creation of misleading musical judgements.

The temptation to tamper with or instigate cultural progression may be greater in those groups where feelings are mixed and fragile. Musical coercion is as dangerous as 'language engineering', a term used in sociolinguistics when developing a realistic policy concerning the selection and use of languages or dialects to aid effective communication. As with Kartomi (1981:229-230), I believe the move of music into new cultural environments can be achieved, but I also believe it carries risks similar to any sustainable development programme, particularly if suggested by

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²¹ Ref. Kartomi's (1981) feelings on 'nativistic musical revival'; also similar sentiments of Chaudhuri (1992:36), Nketia (1991:92), and Robertson (1991:362).

²² On my first visit to Mount Elgon in 1994, I talked with a number of musicians, pastors, missionaries and linguists who alerted me to some of the problems outlined here and asked that I devise a means of counteracting these. Although they were not official 'spokesmen' for the entire community, I later established their concerns to be widely acknowledged amongst other Sabaot.

outsiders. This is ironic in that most prevailing musical influences come from outside Kenya, but the manner in which they enter the perceptual grid of the Sabaot is deemed to be their own choice.

Church leaders now have considerable influence concerning which cultural attitudes are sanctioned in Kenya as a whole, but not all of these leaders are necessarily aware of the wider consequences of such beliefs. Part of the problem is that much of the church still relies on thinking that is laden with western overtones, and leaders need to be involved in a process of exploration that will help them reconsider the traditions of their people in a new light. If they choose to encourage other forms of music, that is their prerogative, but the options should be fully understood.

There are many issues of reactivity that can emerge from the work of the ethnomusicologist. From the nationalistic viewpoint discussed earlier, any interest in a category of music that the wider Kenya considers 'marginal' may inadvertently cause further isolation of a minority group. Such forces of reflexivity can be triggered by as little as our presence, even before we identify ourselves with any distinctives.²³ We can also be accused of aggravating the commercialisation of traditional music, or of willingly promoting traditional music in a simplified form owing to its separation from associated ceremonies. Finally, there is the danger of building temporary bridges to gain people's trust simply to satisfy a personal agenda or the dictates of the scholarly world. This unfortunate consequence has already impacted the Sabaot who have been the subject of several foreign film documentaries over the years and feel some sense of cultural plunder.

#### **1.4 Literature review**

Any overview of theoretical development in ethnomusicology must be selective, but my intention is to include enough to highlight some fundamentals of approach and show how my research is located within the field of ethnomusicology. Two additional areas that have strong relevancy to my research include those of cultural signification and linguistic relationships.

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²³ Ref. Myers, 1993:12.

Although the actual term 'ethnomusicology' did not appear until the 1950s, the embryonic shape of the discipline began in the 1880s when ethnographic investigation of sounds was merged with the more theoretical origins and distribution of music.²⁴ These aspects have remained key components of ethnomusicology, with different scholars favouring one or other aspect depending on their research design. New dimensions have rapidly emerged as the discipline has advanced, particularly in the twentieth century.

Initial thinking had many parallels to anthropology, with oriental or exotic forms of music arousing the interest of musicologists such as Gilman (1909). Composers were also eager for new sounds and concepts, in particular Claude Debussy²⁵ who was impacted by the symbolism, sense of design, tonality and timbre in Chinese and Javanese music performed at the 1889 Paris World Exhibition. Shortly after, Bartók embarked on an extensive collection of European folksongs.

Terminology did not undergo any serious debate until a growing awareness of cultural phenomena in comparative musicology emerged in the writings of Jaap Kunst (1950) and Mantle Hood (1957). It was Kunst who first introduced the prefix 'ethno', and the idea of geographical distinctiveness was seen as an important criterion. The desire for definition of ethnomusicology was entering a period of intense debate, reflected in an early contribution of Bruno Nettl (1956:1): "the science that deals with the music of peoples outside of Western civilisation".

Merriam (1964:5), however, was not content with ethnomusicology being a process of 'where', but felt it should be more about 'how and why'. This link with motivations, beliefs and behavioural patterns of people prompted the first of Alan Merriam's definitions (1960:109; 1964:6), namely "the study of music in culture". He also turned his attentions to heuristic concepts such as the extent to which trial and error affects the creation of new culture traits. Although this returned the focus to 'where', it was enlarged from non-western countries and their so-called 'exotic' musics to include the wider world. The scope of ethnomusicology also expanded to encompass the disciplines of arts, humanities, social sciences and physical sciences. Today any humanly produced pattern of sound conceived as music by its exponents

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²⁴ Merriam, 1964:3.

²⁵ Reflected in compositions such as *Pagodes* and *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*.

is considered worthy of study, and the variety of philosophies and methods utilised continues to unfold as the field of ethnomusicology develops.

In the Kenyan context, early opinions of culture and development potential as voiced by Government officers reveal a shameful ethnocentricity. In the Phelps-Stokes Fund Commission Report of 1920-2 (reflecting colonial education policy), it was noted that Kenyan arts and crafts displayed "substantial evidences of their capacity to respond to the wise approaches of civilisation" (Herskovits, 1962:226). The British educationalist A. V. Murray (1967:323-5) likewise wrote:

"There is no 'African culture' as yet. ...for while the African has no history in the sense which I have held to be necessary for culture, no recorded stages of development through which we can see some mental quality persisting, he has at any rate before him history in the making".

Anthropologist Henri Junod (1912) had a more forgiving stance:

"The black race is essentially musical; its gifts in this domain are real and if properly developed will certainly produce remarkable results in time".

Hugh Tracey (1932) then broke boundaries to align himself with the African cause and plead for the encouragement of native tunes and talent, and Richard Waterman (1952:207-18) expanded ethnomusicological conceptions by exploring interaction and syncretistic compatibility between African and western music traits.

Other musicologists were devising ways to more effectively categorise musical patterns within the African continent. Merriam (1959(i):78; 1977:244) developed a means to define the 'central core area' of musical features found in the macro regions of sub-Saharan Africa, whilst Alan Lomax (1968) decided to profile various musical zones across Africa in a scheme known as cantometric analysis. This was based on homogeneity of subsistence modes, geographical location and linguistic groupings,²⁶ whereas the German *Kulturkreis* concept leaned more towards periodisation of history. However, such taxonomic tools have inherent problems of definition and description, and have been increasingly challenged as the continent of Africa moves along the road of change. Previous boundaries and typologies within music are fading, and it is not uncommon to find musical features, instruments and initiatives spreading across new and wider areas.

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²⁶ Kenya, for example, was divided into Northeast Bantu and Central Bantu.

Africa's own music scholars began to respond in the 1920s, stirred by the negativity of colonial thinking, "the need for developing consciousness of identity" and the lack of dialogue between African and western musicians (Nketia, 1998:15, 62-63). Klaus Wachsmann (1966:62), educator and curator of the Uganda Museum in Kampala, encouraged his African students to move away from a state of passivity by investigating various musical environments, and to switch from wide-scale comparative studies such as those of Lomax to specific ethnographic topics. The first overseas-educated musicologist, Nicholas Ballanta (born 1894), returned to Africa and demonstrated that music in Africa was designed to be used for a purpose rather than cultivated for its own sake. Ballanta was also aware of the importance of using indigenous music as a tool of evangelism, believing this would convey the truth because "it would get him [the African] to sing about the love of God in his own way" (Smith 1926:73).

Kenya began the struggle to reassert its identity following independence from colonisation in 1963, but had to contend with many shifts in social norms. Cultural heritage-keepers who had previously passed musical skills from generation to generation (of which Sabaot elders are an example) were being replaced by state education, and ethnomusicologists world-wide were soon to become concerned over the continuity of certain musical genres. It was clear there was an urgent need to document and preserve existing or threatened musical materials.

The use of transcription had already been recognised by Hornbostel and Abraham (1919:1) as an important 'investment value' in ethnomusicological methodology, being of particular relevance for cultures that had relied on oral transmission with no written records. In South Africa, Hugh Tracey completed archives of audio samples, written documentation and commentary on musical performance, believing that this contribution of factual data to an uncharted field was paramount. George List (1979) also extended the role of ethnography, seeing it as the cornerstone of all theoretical and structural investigation rather than an optional or alternative aspect of ethnomusicology.

At the same time, debate concerning transcription of musical sounds was now focusing more on the descriptive (notating the music according to the reality of actual performance) than the prescriptive (notating a piece to demonstrate how it



should be reproduced as sound). Musicologists such as Kubik (1972:28) were aware, for example, of the significance of 'air beats' (empty beats) in musical structure, these being an integral part of the African musician's motor behaviour. Charles Seeger (1958:168) was equally concerned that sight and sound did not always match up in notation.

It was also realised that African music could no longer be considered as based on a tempered diatonic scale simply because African musicians accepted their music played on the piano.²⁷ Music systems were now being investigated in which it was impossible to match pitches with tempered tuning,²⁸ whilst Seth Cudjoe (1958) decided that a numerical notation system was more suitable for the complex drummed music of the Ewe people.

It should be added here that amongst the Sabaot musicians on Mount Elgon, there is no evidence of any form of indigenous musical notation ever having been used prior to the commencement of schooling and the introduction of staff notation in the national music curriculum. Instead, the Sabaot relied on memory to maintain their considerable repertoire of traditional songs, aided by the relationship between body movement and pulse which imprinted musical patterns deep within the performers.²⁹

An area that has seen little reorganisation but not from want of investigation is the classification of musical instruments. Many musicologists feel the Hornbostel Sachs method of 1914 has limitations in coping with the increasing sophistication of instrument classification and new materials being used in their construction, whilst another concern is that the structural side of instruments is being emphasised to the detriment of their broader cultural context. However, no system has yet been devised that fully satisfies all possibilities. The Hornbostel Sachs method divides instruments into four categories each with numerical sub-divisions, and the use of numbers means the classification is relatively free from misleading descriptive connotations.³⁰ There have been attempts to find more detailed systems such as one based on acoustic principles (Karl Izikowitz, 1935) or by the addition of new categories such

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²⁷ A belief proposed by Ward, 1927:200.

²⁸ As with Amu (1933) in Ghana.

²⁹ Ref. Kubik (1994:38) for African observations on the inhibitions caused by 'music on paper'.

³⁰ For example, the description 'Chinese violin' wrongly suggests a hybrid of Europe and China.

as 'electrophones' (Galpin, 1937),³¹ but none have been used to the same extent as the Hornbostel Sachs method.

Many different aspects of African music have now being documented, including considerable focus on rhythmic organisation. In one of the earliest observations of music systems along the Gold Coast, written by W. E. Ward (1927:214-220), his conclusions of triple and duple divisions being suspended over a consistent duple percussion or pulse line remain surprisingly valid for Sabaot songs:

"Triple time is unknown. This is not to say that triple time-figures are excluded from African music. But even where a tune is in what sounds to European ears triple time, the underlying percussion rhythm makes it quite clear that the African feels it as duple time".

Also clearly applicable in Sabaot songs is the physical or motor behaviour dimension of performance. This is described in Richard Waterman's study (1952) of the African influence on American music as 'metronome sense' or the unconscious emic pulse framework undergirding all variation. Both Herskovits (1941(i)) and Richard Waterman (1948:25) demonstrated that determinants of style such as implicit rhythm are carried below a person's level of consciousness and therefore increase the resistance of music to change.

However, there was also a growing feeling that structural analysts were isolating 'essential' musical elements from the broader musical context and becoming over-consumed by abstract fashions rather than the true needs of a situation. Warnings were eventually sounded by George List (1979:23) and Felá Sówándé (1972:59-69), and attention began to focus on the reasons and ways in which people conceived, made and appreciated musical sounds, including the embodiment of cultural concepts.³²

Although Blacking retained analytical theory in his earlier study of the Venda (1971(i), 1981), he too was uncomfortable with analysis that promoted more of the theoretical than the sociological viewpoint, feeling this was insufficient to reveal the essential makeup of a musical style. Merriam likewise had revised his earlier definition of ethnomusicology to align with this growing research in human

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³¹ Readers should refer to a comprehensive article on the history of musical instrument classification by Margaret Kartomi (2001).

³² As described in Ter Ellingson's article "Transcription" (1992:110-152).

conceptualisation and behaviour. "Music *in* culture" (1960:109) became "music *is* culture" (1977:204), so reopening the fragmenting relationship between anthropology and musicology. A recent application of this has been Roderic Knight's work (1984:24ff.) on linking musical time with cultural time-reckoning systems amongst the Mandinka.

Research in cultural signification has determined music to be an experience of life itself, and meaningless if isolated from its performers and audiences (Merriam 1964:vii). From the African point of view, a song structure such as call and response correlates with social values of community and team-spirit, whilst "music means much more than modes, melodic direction, intervals, harmony and the like. It is part of a way of life".³³ Merriam (1964:210) was concerned that covert functional values in such a 'way of life' would be overlooked by researchers dulled by their own expectations of music (as previously discussed in section 1.3). Although music is studied in relation to known models and theories, many preliterate peoples have no theoretical understanding of their music and it is a considerable challenge for the ethnomusicologist to provide a model without any assumptions of universal phenomena.

Both Nattiez (1975) and Monelle (1992:90-94) have sought ways to eliminate the possibility of preconceptions by advocating music analysis on a 'neutral level', using abstract analytical criteria free of any imposed values. This separation of analysis from the act of 'being produced' and the symbolic perception or cultural bias of the listener is the realm of semiotics, or the theory of signs that avoids any speculation of musical signification. John Kaemmer (1980) preferred a middle line and advocated the need to evaluate both the cognitive and the social. His assumption was that music is the product of both and thus requires an all-embracing approach combining movement, language and use of space. Feld's research (1982) amongst the Kaluli likewise moved more towards exploring symbolic expressive meaning, and has become a key work in establishing an ethno-aesthetic analysis.

Debate over the importance of semiotics in the analysis of world musics continues, fuelled by the convergence and cross-fertilisation between music and

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³³ Nketia, 1962:3. Sówándé (1972) likewise felt musical meaning to be a function of African world-views.



linguistics. As long ago as 1891, Hanslick felt music could not be a signifying system like language, "as this annihilates the beauty of form in pursuit of meaning". Seventy years later, Harweg (1968:273) reached a similar conclusion for a different reason: "Music is not a signification / representational institution as is language. Language and music, in view of their immanent function, cannot be compared at all".

A. M. Jones was one of earliest musicologists to notice a relationship between phonemic tone and interval direction, although Hornbostel (1928:31-32) had already stated that the speaking voice appeared to determine the melodic nucleus. Jones (1949:11-12) decided that the words of translated hymns "need separate melodic treatment to make the tune agree with the rise and fall of the syllables....[if not], African melody is in a strait-jacket". The idea of relating linguistic methods to musicology was then given more prominence by Bruno Nettl in 1958, as together with Noam Chomsky's work on *Syntactic Structures* (1957), he spearheaded a flurry of cross-disciplinary applications of the vocal-auditory mode. Since then there have been many contributors to this merger of disciplines including William Bright (1963), Harold Powers (1980) and Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983).

Chomsky introduced the mathematical term 'generative' to the linguistic components of phonology and syntax, referring primarily to the capacity of a grammar to be defined as a set of formal structural rules capable of being tested by reconstitution. Musicologists were quick to ask whether music could likewise be regenerated as a result of analysis, and it was Chomsky's model, combined with the work of the linguist Kenneth L. Pike, which ethnomusicologist Vida Chenoweth then adapted for her work in defining music structures (1979, 1980).

Monelle describes Chenoweth's approach as "musical distributionalism based on pertinence" (1992:64), referring to the distinction she makes between intervals and their environments using emic rather than etic perception.³⁴ By unlocking the key to the more complex music patterns usually understood only by those born within a culture, Chenoweth's method presents the 'outsider' with the basis for understanding emic compositional rules, and therefore bypasses the need for acculturation of the analyst. There have been several other systems developed that

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³⁴ Pike's use of these terms (derived from phonetic and phonemic structures of sound) was central in describing the perception of behaviour. Ref. Pike 1967, Chapter 2: "Etic and emic standpoints for the description of behaviour", pp.37-72. See Glossary.

enable generation of music based on linguistic principles, but not to the extent of enabling generation of actual songs.³⁵

More recent musilinguistic investigations have focused on the links between musical pitch and the lexical tone used to convey meaning in speech (Brown, 2000:280-300), although theories as to the freedom of music to move independent of linguistic notions are still in their infancy. It is highly likely that such a link contributes to the strengthening of semantic and identity aspects of the two partners involved, and is particularly relevant for the Sabaot who maintain use of their mother tongue in the face of considerable national pressure to do otherwise.

Finally, of the specific writings on the Sabaot or closely related people groups, by far the most authoritative is Goldschmidt's anthropological perspective on the Sebei (1976), although he makes few comments on music. There are also a number of published articles relating to the findings of early colonial explorers on Mount Elgon, including studies on clan structure and marriage customs. The study of Kalenjin religious and social practices (Fish, 1995) is a valuable application of redemptive analogies, and although it contains very little on songs, has much on ceremonies and daily life. Denyer (1980) has documented the lyres of the northern Kerio valley, and Malcolm Floyd (1999) more recently the lyres used by the Samburu and Turkana peoples.

Additional papers have been compiled by various missionaries who have lived amongst the Sabaot, but the majority of these remain unpublished. Linguistic work amongst the Sabaot continues to proliferate through the research of BTL (including Larsen, Leonard and Mang'esoy) whilst two descriptions of the closely related *Kubsābiiny* (Sebei group) dialect are by Montgomery (1966) and O'Brien & Cuypers (1975). Anthropologist Godfrey Kipsisey is currently completing further research on Sabaot culture and behaviour.

A number of studies have been made of trends in African church music, including Warnock's (1983) historical overview of worship development in sub-Saharan African churches, which warns of tension if a more indigenous approach is not sought (*ibid.*:144). African theologians are now well aware of the problem: "We

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³⁵ Ref. Monelle's discussion (1992:172-187) on the work of Nylund, Cooper, Powers, Chenoweth and Becker. Chenoweth's generative methodology is demonstrated in an analysis of the Faiwol music system in Irian Jaya by Taylor, 1992.

need to dress [Christianity] in African clothing if it is to be of any lasting significance to the indigenous peoples".³⁶ This is one thing to acknowledge and another to implement, which explains why there are still church musicians, both western and African, who believe that Africanising borrowed hymns through the addition of drums or shakers creates authentic African hymnody.

Such processes of adaptation are now so deeply ingrained in African church music that they have attracted a number of recent studies by African scholars. Musumba (1993), for example, has focused on the agents and processes of acculturation within a specific urban church of Nairobi, demonstrating the adaptability and interaction to be found in a cosmopolitan setting of mixed cultures. Kidula (1986) examines similar effects of syncretism and adaptation in church music of firstly the Logoli people, and then the popularised worship format of urban churches in Kenya (1998).

As for secular African music that relates to the Sabaot, it is only the wider Kalenjin group of people that is referred to in writings by African ethnomusicologists such as Paul Kavyû (see bibliography) and George Senoga-Zake (1986). Specific Sabaot culture traits are lost in such surveys as broad as these and there is clearly an urgent need to document the secular musics of Kenya in more detailed and scholarly manner.

## **1.5 Objectives and hypotheses**

The primary objective of this thesis is the documenting and analysing of a little known field, that of Sabaot music. This will involve investigating a number of key factors that I anticipate to be shaping the attitudes of Sabaot people towards their traditional styles of music, and also examining the means and consequences of any changes in their music use. These angles will be considered in relation to their overall culture, since Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952:357) remind us music is both "the product of action, and the conditioning elements of further action". Accordingly, my first line of investigation is the historical, social, geographical and cultural elements of Sabaot life, and their influence on the state of performance arts amongst the Sabaot during this last century.

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³⁶ Omulokoli, 1988:42; see also Mbiti, 1971:2.

Secondly, I hope to identify features pertaining to Sabaot traditional music that set this particular system apart from other musics being used by the Sabaot. These need to be considered sufficiently symbolic of Sabaot musical ideals by Sabaot musicians themselves. It is possible such features may have some future role in regeneration or even cross-fertilisation should another music system threaten to overwhelm the host. I fully expect there will be greater and lesser degrees of centrality among the features of the Sabaot musical repertory, including aspects of musical behaviour and conceptualisation, and that which seems to my ear to be a significant feature may be unimportant from the Sabaot emic perspective. I envisage emic identity markers as being analogous to the genetic DNA within living beings, but am aware that just as most people are unaware of their own personal DNA design, so it will be difficult for Sabaot musicians to consciously isolate all the components of their music.

Strange as it may sound, this objective is not about preserving selected features of identity, but of finding bridges that will help other music genres to link more closely with the pre-existing Sabaot traditional style. It is about finding a balance between musics that might otherwise oppose one another, based on the value system of the relevant culture itself. The precedent exists in languages, as ethnic speakers can reformulate the rules of a closely related language to become more congruent with those of their own.³⁷ It is also already evidenced in the songs of Mang'esoy (a skilled Sabaot musician), but more research is needed to understand how this process actually works. I fully expect that attributes which are unique to one system can either be changed in transfer or else adapt to the extent they have little similarity with the original.

The third key area to be investigated is the link between Sabaot music and language and the implications if one or other is substituted. I believe that co-use of these fosters a stronger likelihood of their continuance, particularly in Africa where there is a predominance of music that requires an interactive relationship between melody and word. The functional role and growth of a music system cannot be guaranteed if its formative context no longer exists,³⁸ but if some essence of that

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³⁷ Cf. Kapanga's research (1991:229) on Shaba Swahili.

³⁸ Blacking (1986:133-4) believes that mutual understanding is compromised if the necessary context no longer exists.

context remains, then the continuance of the music system in question may become more feasible.

There is also the need to investigate whether the language rules for song texts differ from those of ordinary speech, and whether sudden changes may herald a potential shift in either the music or the language. It is known that language shift seldom occurs in a vacuum, but I anticipate that linking such paradigms with those of music use is a significant study that will need to be undertaken at a later date.

Moving from these theoretical and analytical aims, a final consideration is the applied aspect of research. A theoretical music analysis will have little meaning for the Sabaoth unless presented in relevant and practical terms, which is why the methodology of this study has been shaped around a series of interactive workshops. This concept of feedback ensures that sharing and dissemination of ideas takes place. However, this research is not intended to be prescriptive for the Sabaoth in any sense. Instead, the hope is to foster their desire to understand for themselves the cultural implications of music use, and to realise they do not have to bend with every wind that blows but can make their own culturally relevant decisions about the future of their music. This is the time for ideas, dialogue and musical response.

### **1.5.1 Assumptions**

The design of this research has been based on a number of key premises in the broad areas of music, language, cultural change and interpretative processes. Of the 'givens' pertaining to music, my first is that every music system known to man is unique in some combination of form, structure and meaning. This negates the idea that music is a universal language common to all, although it is still possible to establish universal paradigms that operate both within and across music systems. Its communicative role is known to cover not just the auditory sense, but also the kinaesthetic, visual and tactile,³⁹ hence there are many inter-related aspects to be considered. Meaning in music is also designated through symbolic or socio-cultural experiences. However, as all communication is an ongoing process of interpretation, this means the connotations derived from particular event situations where music is used do not

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³⁹ I owe much to the 1981 article of Stone and Stone.



have to remain fixed. This is of particular significance in challenging typified associative meanings attached to certain Sabaot songs.

Another premise is that both a person's mother tongue and the music to which they are exposed in early life will evoke a cognitive response in subsequent years, even if they have been superseded in use. A commitment to other media may cause the original state of response to sink to the subconscious level, but re-exposure in urban and church settings has visually reinforced that people will react involuntarily when they hear or experience that which was first inherently familiar to them. Although I work on the premise that the combination of mother tongue and heart music is a highly effective communicative means, I am also open to the possibility of other combinations being equally effective. If these meet the changing value criteria of the society in which they exist, then viability must be acknowledged.

It is already known that musical styles which no longer serve their original purpose can successfully fulfil other functions (Elbourne, 1975:183). Part of this is the concept of centrality, where the primary features of a musical style symbolise a particular sense of ownership and meaning, and can be used in more than one context.

Analysis has shown there are many semantic similarities and shared features between a people's primary language and music, this being of relevance when working with tonal languages such as Sabaot. It does not negate that musics may also be strongly influenced by instrumental features such as has occurred with the *bukantiit*, so both possibilities must be considered.⁴⁰ A follow-on from this is that the culture of any particular people group is likely to respond to an inter-locking system of cause and effect. When one element changes, it is likely to influence the other components of the system so that the consequences are wider than first predicted.

Cultural change and interpretative processes have been the subject of considerable research, and although this work is partially concerned with testing some of these ideas, their application is made with an oral-based culture in mind. The assumption is that oral-based cultures must be active in their communication, a case of 'use it or lose it'. Although the Sabaot are now rapidly becoming literate and

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⁴⁰ Brown (2000:291) proposes that this linked organisation of 'pitch, length and strength' mechanisms derives from early forms of 'referential emotive vocalisation' which have now specialised into specific music and language communication. Also ref. Agawu (1987:418) for instrumental links.

instinctively desiring to try new things, many of their thought-patterns still relate to oral means of transmission, and there remain obvious weaknesses in their approach to safeguarding earlier heritage.

I am also aware that my interpretations of data are very much 'first-order constructs', being the inevitable etic consequence of an outsider (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973:62). Some distortion of how things really are is inevitable, but what cannot be distorted is the wealth of untapped creative resources available to Sabaot musicians in every context. I agree with Nketia (1998:48) that the aim of all African musicology should include a commitment to the society that cultivates the subject matter of research.

## **1.6 Methodology**

As with all the objectives stated earlier, the selection of methodology has been mindful of bridging the gulf between traditional ways of life and the life-style considered acceptable to the church. An ethnographic approach in ethnomusicology is rooted in social and cultural anthropology, and implies "learning from the people" by means of participant observation and a range of other methods.⁴¹ There has been some debate over the years as to the interpretation of ethnography,⁴² with the focus moving from the collective beliefs and practices of small scale communities to a greater emphasis on individuals within a specific culture and the influence they have over the other members of that community. Within this particular study of the Sabaot these approaches have tended to merge, and the conclusions are more qualitative than quantitative. Methods of data-gathering include interviews, questionnaires, photographs and audio recordings.

### **1.6.1 Data selection and limitations**

During my visits to the mountain between 1994 and 2001, the village of Chewangoy in Mount Elgon district became my base. In particular, a small one-roomed wooden hut which I shared with rats and a hive of uncooperative bees. A tent sufficed when exploring the moorlands above Mount Elgon National Park. Each visit I would usually remain on the mountain for periods of one to three weeks, and although a list

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⁴¹ Spradley, 1980:3.

⁴² Notably Titon, 1997.



of workshop dates is given in Appendix IV, there were a number of additional trips made for data collection.

On dry days I was able to access a wide swathe of the Kenyan side of the mountain using a 4-wheel drive vehicle, extending from Cheptais in the south-west to Kitale in the north-east. The more inaccessible areas were reached by foot, and this was also the mode of transport during the rains when paths became treacherous mud. Whether rain or shine, the villagers of Chewangoy were welcoming and supportive: every morning people would wait outside my door to greet me, and if I needed to know where to find a particular person on the mountain, often there was news of their last-known whereabouts.

As will be described in chapter 2.2, the mountain divides fairly easily into four physiographic zones that provide elements of contrastive musical and sociological data. I have collected songs and ethnographic data from all levels but more particularly amongst the remaining *Mosoobiisyēk*, many of whom have been least exposed to elements of change. However, it is inappropriate to emphasise zone distinctions. The Sabaot themselves will describe a person "of the top or from below", but their stronger desire is to be unified rather than compartmentalised.⁴³

In terms of area covered, only three of the six Government Districts on the mountain have been included in fieldwork, namely Mount Elgon, Bungoma and Trans-Nzoia. The West Pokot and Uasin-Gishu Districts were not surveyed owing to the vastness of the areas concerned, the stronger influences from other quarters and the lower concentrations of Sabaot. Neither have I conducted any fieldwork in the Sebei District area, although I refer to the writings of Goldschmidt (1976, 1986) as there is relatively little to separate these people from the Sabaot apart from dialect and a border. Customs and beliefs show some variance, but these are discussed as they become relevant to the text.

A further limitation has been imposed on song styles, such that only features of traditional songs and those being used in churches are contrasted here. Other song genres are discussed in chapter five, but I would consider their influence at this point

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⁴³ This was exemplified when the Sabaot mutually agreed to the *Koony* dialect representing all other Sabaot dialects in literacy development and translation work.

in time to be considerably less than the church songs, and there is not scope to cover all here.

### 1.6.2 Data-gathering fieldwork

The usual progression in research of this nature is to consult available writings before heading into fieldwork, but in this case the opportunity to research the Sabaot came first. On the one hand, I recognise that previous research could have shaped this work differently, but on the other (as Kubik, 1994:91 and others have advocated) there are some advantages to avoiding the additional bias of matching what others may have predicted.

Interviews with mother tongue speakers, collecting songs and attending many of the ceremonial events would have been impossible without the help of two assistants/interpreters, Stanley Ndiema and Patrick Mang'esoy. Ndiema lives with his family in Cheptoror, whilst Mang'esoy now works as a linguistic consultant intern for BTL in Nairobi but makes frequent trips to the mountain.⁴⁴ Both were born on the mountain, are fluent in Sabaot, Swahili and English, and have been the source of numerous insights into Sabaot life.

The use of mother tongue during interviews has been necessary as Swahili is not understood sufficiently well by all and people can express cultural concepts better in their own tongue. Ndiema and Mang'esoy were a great help in phrasing questions as clearly as possible, and their presence often made my own less intrusive. As they became more familiar with the line of investigation they would include questions of their own for additional clarification, knowing I would not be satisfied with incomplete answers. Unfortunately this had to be balanced with interpreters putting answers into the informants' mouths, withholding answers they thought unimportant, and protecting me from the truths of heated debate. I also learnt a considerable amount from trying to unravel details inferred or assumed as unspoken norms.

Patrick in particular has been a great incentive for this research, due to his rare vision for combining vernacular language and traditional music styles. A skilled player of the *bukantiit* from childhood, he became interested in linguistics and joined

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⁴⁴ See Appendix I.

the SBTL translation team. Challenged to find the most natural way of expressing Biblical concepts into the Sabaot language, he read in Psalm 150 that it was acceptable to use every instrument to praise the Lord, including the harp and lyre. It dawned on him that 'natural' meant composing Scripture songs in the manner that he had known from childhood and using the instrument that was readily to hand. He now combines the traditional song structures of his father with the language of his mother, contextualising God's teaching in ways that he knows speak clearly and without ambiguity to his people.

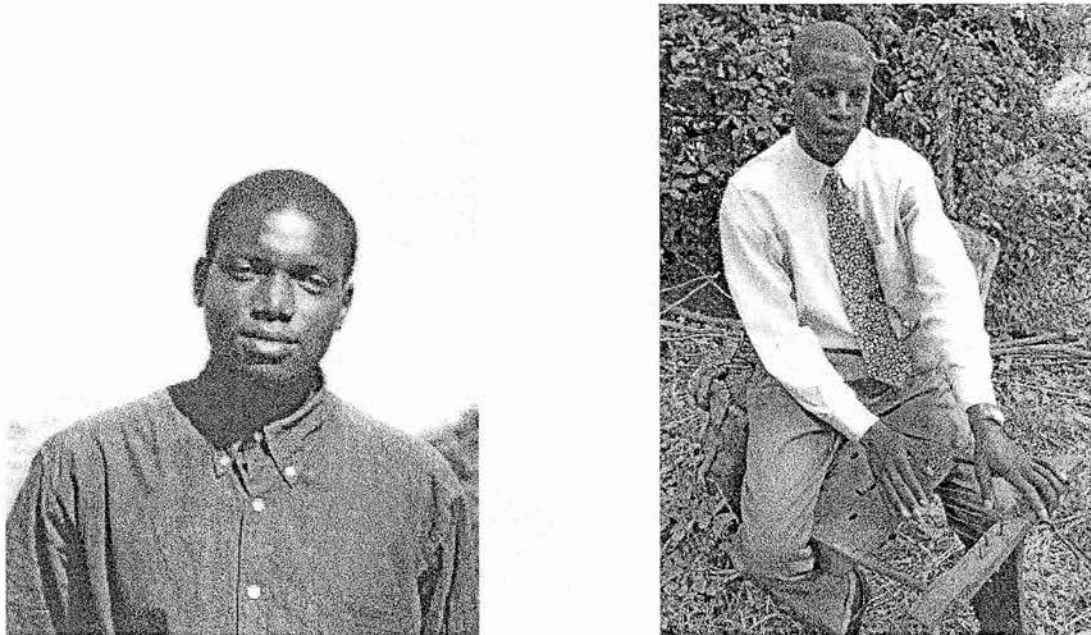


Plate 1a: Stanley Ndiema (on left) and Patrick Mang'esoy (playing the *bukantiit*)

### *Interviews*

Most of the interview material quoted in this thesis was interpreted from Sabaot to English and then entered into field journals. Interview sessions sometimes lasted many hours owing to the formalities of 'bonding' and hospitality requirements before everyone felt sufficiently at ease to discuss serious matters. Some interviewees appeared hesitant on seeing a tape recorder while others 'played to the gallery', giving answers they thought I wanted rather than reflecting their true beliefs. The presence of a microphone clearly exacerbated this and, as I was unable to reduce their reactivity, I decided to only record during music-making sessions.

When the situation allowed, interviewees from a wide spectrum of representative, qualitative informants gave demographic information such as place of

birth, current residence, ethnic origin, languages and dialect spoken (in order of acquisition), age (approximate in many cases), education, time spent out of the Sabaot community, occupation, and musical training. There were singers of traditional music (male and female, all ages), school music teachers, instrument makers, choir masters, respected local historians, clergy, local missionaries, linguists, members of SBTL, various Government officials, and a selection of local people. Most were Sabaot mother tongue speakers.⁴⁵

Although this may seem a long list, large-scale comparisons were not the aim. Instead I hoped to create a balanced coverage of 'key' people by gradually building up contacts in the broader community.

### *Questionnaires*

In his comparative study of Bantu and Kalenjin groups, Edgerton (1971:198-99) chose a questionnaire format based on the assumption that his respondents would each offer a brief answer. In the case of the Sabaot, I found addressing questions to one person was almost impossible as people would immediately gather and everyone wanted their opinion to be heard. There was a clear preference shown for answering questions in a group context and considerable discussion before any summary was offered. Although this approach is appropriate for ethnographic, contextual data, it is less useful for specific lines of enquiry.

In the initial phases of data collection, I designed a series of questionnaires exploring a wide range of factors that I believed might have either direct or indirect influence on sociomusical development amongst the Sabaot. These included topics such as environment, history, economy, society, education, language, religion, and external relationships. Later, for reasons outlined, I decided to abandon pre-planned questionnaires and follow whatever cues might emerge.

### *Participant observation*

Dispassionate observation is a good starting point, but is difficult to maintain in light of Nketia's comment on commitment (section 1.5.1). To the Sabaot, commitment is exemplified by dialogue and interaction, hence the meaning of

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⁴⁵ The full list is included in Appendices I and IV.

participant participation as applied here is not 'looking at' but 'looking with'. Visual observation is indispensable for paring away the more generalised cultural layers and looking for the deeper truth so often left unsaid, but serves limited purpose in understanding the living culture of the Sabaot unless there are also semi-structured encounters.

Spradley (1980:3) describes participant observation as understanding life "from the native point of view", implying a doorway into emic realism. Certainly no amount of verbal description can equate with physically attending a traditional ceremony such as circumcision, marriage or a funeral, as these open many more windows. Other opportunities for observation have been church services, local public meetings and music workshops, although the latter are described in more detail under data evaluation.

### *Collection and recording*

The first reliable samples and transcriptions of African music were credited to Erich M. von Hornbostel in 1917 (Merriam 1967:89), but apart from recordings made by Lori Schrag Tapia in 1987,⁴⁶ there has been no subsequent collecting of the Sabaot musical heritage.

For purposes of this study, a modest cross-section of traditional and more recent song types from locations such as people's homes, churches, market areas and bare hillsides has now been collated. The quality is variable owing to rain, crowing roosters and curious onlookers, but such recording ambience is true to Sabaot life. The aim has been to gather several examples of each category of song for transcription and comparative structural analysis, and also to establish the foundations of a Sabaot sound archive that I hope will be extended further in years to come.

To gather the right group and instrument combination for a particular singing event took considerable time and planning, and even then it was highly unpredictable whether everyone would turn up on the appointed day. There were inconsistencies such as solo songs becoming group events if others decided to prompt the lead singer, and group songs reduced to solos if no-one else was present. Other songs

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⁴⁶ A collection of 113 songs, currently stored in the Library of Congress Archives, Washington D.C.



were not able to be recorded as the person who was supposed to sing them could not be found or the rains were coming or crops had to be planted. I can well identify with the frustrations of archaeologist J.E.G. Sutton (1964) in his researching the origins of early highland inhabitants and attempting to satisfactorily reconcile oral accounts with hard evidence. In my case the difficulties have revolved around historical data, song categories and musical instruments.

### **1.6.3 Data Analysis**

Although an ethnographic approach has proved essential in this research, it does not throw light upon theoretical aspects without some supporting structural analysis. The next phase has therefore been to make an etic transcription of each song true to the actual performance, using staff notation based on Hertz frequency cycles where A440 is given in relation to the reference tone of C4 (261 Hz). Time-signatures are marked only where I believe they can represent the performers' rhythmic intentions, derived from minute stresses in texts, use of percussive elements and body actions. The actual subdivisions of pulse are relative. For example, a song notated as 2/4 might also be 4/8 or 4/4. Certain songs have been notated in free-rhythm form owing to multiple possibilities of metrical subdivision, and in these cases, the endings of main phrases or flows of melody are indicated with half-lines.

The body of transcriptions included with this thesis is intended to be both a partial anthology and a support for theoretical discussion. What is included represents only a fraction of what has actually been recorded, and many variations are possible in terms of layout. For example, cyclical form could be better illustrated by overlaying segments in more obvious fashion (although this has been done where possible), solo and response sections could be on separate staves for clearer comparison, and repetitions with minor variations could be deleted whilst concentrating on major differences. However, the intention here is a series of performance transcriptions, being mindful that songs which have been laid out in devised patterns to prove particular points may be a hindrance to subsequent referral.

Outsiders should also be aware that many Sabaot songs do not have clear endings in actual performance as the length is determined by the circumstances of the event. This means that some transcriptions here are shortened owing to the



considerable length of the recorded material. In others, the soloist's shout of "*Bas!*" heard at the end is Swahili (*basi*) for 'that's all!', signalling closure for listeners, singers and the recording technician. Another expression sometimes used is "*Kōōnkoy!*", being Sabaot for 'thank you'.

Although I agree with Titon (1997:87) that it is not transcription and analysis but fieldwork which constitutes the essence of ethnomusicology, a fuller understanding of the construction of Sabaot music has been needed to support practical composition workshops. Sabaot traditions are caught up in the social upheavals of a modernising nation, and in this situation of fluidity, it is easy to misinterpret unless interview materials are supported by analysis.⁴⁷

When I first read 's statement that "music is one of the rare aspects of culture whose structure can be transcribed to paper and expressed precisely through arithmetic and statistical means",⁴⁸ I felt he was betraying his own definition of 'music as culture'. However, I now believe he too saw transcription as a step to a more complete understanding, providing a framework for the aesthetic essence that defies precision or predictability.

The danger in any investigation of structural patterns and commonalities is that it relies on concepts that are extraneous to the African historical and cultural background. Although analysis is simply a tool, it must be relevant to the situation, and in this case, should have some link with the current concepts and practices of the people themselves. Since the Sabaot are committed users of their mother tongue, a linguistic-based means of uncovering musical organisation is therefore valid.

As described earlier, the methodology of Vida Chenoweth (1979, 1980) determines emic elements of a music system by checking interval successions and specific environments that govern choice of intervals. These 'rules' can then be used as a blueprint by outsiders to enable compositional regeneration of music that is deemed of emic status by those fluent in the original music system. What is particularly of interest regarding the Sabaot situation is that if these emic elements are transferred to more recent styles of music, acceptance by a wider range of society occurs rather than ridicule and rejection. It is for this reason that the Chenoweth

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⁴⁷ This in no way implies that verbal answers have been inaccurate or inadequate.

⁴⁸ Merriam, 1964:297.

model is used here to define the structural rules of Sabaot music, although I do not believe there is any need to extend it to the level of regenerating melodic forms at this point in time. There appear to be plenty of active Sabaot composers who can willingly take these ideas and develop them without the stimulus of generated materials.

With the Chenoweth method of transformational generative analysis, hypotheses are made for the conditions in which each interval will predictably occur, based on a comparative study of the intervallic environments found in musical samples of the genre. The presence of variants is also noted at this stage, as well as their likely cause, and examples of this process are given in chapter 8.1.1.1. The next stage of the analysis sequence considers melodic contour, rhythmic features and musical syntax, which Chenoweth (1980:83) defines as "the serial arrangement of musical elements apart from the considerations of tonality". Everything needs to be checked with the musicians to confirm or contradict what is still a hypothesis until this point. The eventual conclusion is a revised summary chart of emic intervals and their allowable variants, which is essential for generative description.

#### **1.6.4 Data evaluation workshops**

Between the years 1994 and 2001, I held five song composition workshops in various locations on the mountain. These were designed to help local musicians become more aware of how their music use impacted their culture, and to create an environment in which they could compose new songs using various techniques and pre-determined emic features. The workshops also enabled me to collect additional examples of music genres currently used by the Sabaot, and to test the findings from my ongoing structural analysis.

Another intent was that the workshops would be a forum in which secular musicians and church leaders could listen to each other's concerns relating to music use today. Set up by various community leaders and myself, the workshops provided a 'safe' ground for discussion of culturally sensitive matters. There was a danger that such a model could create an over-evaluative and critical environment, but as the implications of these meetings dawned on everyone present, participants stayed increasingly later each evening, reluctant to end their discussions.

Everyone who came was given the opportunity to try out different ways of making songs, regardless of whether they had previous experience in composing. Some participants fell into the category of 'Sunday composers', a term I believe is attributable to Klaus Wachsmann, whilst others were highly skilled local musicians who had honed their composition skills on either traditional or church songs. Only the school music teachers and those who had completed primary school could be considered musically literate, these being in the minority. After each period of song-making, participants would then teach their new song to the others, similar to traditional patterns of song dissemination. They then gave a live performance knowing they were being recorded by myself, and received feedback from everyone in the workshop. Active church members were encouraged to take their songs back to their congregations and share what they had done, whilst all participants were also given cassette copies of the new songs to keep as a reminder of their creative efforts.

Each workshop lasted four to six days and began with the group collectively deciding on a list of objectives. The situation facing music use on the mountain today is complex, and setting the aims took considerable time as elders and then youth explained their viewpoint. All the workshops had a considerable focus on traditional song styles, including their relevance, their impact on Sabaot of all ages, their place in the church, their links with the mother tongue, and their unique features. When master musicians were present, their performances of examples provided valuable exposure for those with limited experience of such songs, although other genres were also used in the workshops.

Recognising the significance of the church in future music development amongst the Sabaot, there needed to be a strong slant towards encouraging songs for use in Christian worship. Part of this included helping people review the advantages of combining vernacular Scripture texts with the music closest to their heart. Even the non-Christian traditionalists were happy to use such texts, and those without literacy skills had the passages explained to them so they could then make a song using their newly acquired knowledge. This approach did not preclude songs promoting literacy, community health or social concerns, as motivational relevance needed to extend to every context in order to build the strongest possible base for acceptance amongst the Sabaot.

With all this in mind, the workshops were aimed at four levels in the Sabaot community. The first comprised young church-going men and women, considered by most Sabaot to be the determinants of the future of Sabaot music. Second were the elders, both men and women, most of whom had a good knowledge of their indigenous song repertoire. Third were church leaders with their ability to influence the direction of musical choice amongst their congregations. The last consisted of a newly emerging stratum of 'official' leaders, being those with tertiary education or influential town jobs. When combined, these represented the new opinion leaders in Sabaot society today, a considerable shift in group leadership dynamics from some fifty years past.

In any applied ethnomusicology, ideas need to be disseminated, and are more likely to impact if they take the form of a practical model with demonstration, hands-on application and feedback discussion. Identifying the means for doing this will be developed further in this thesis, seeking appropriate channels for advocacy, application and subsequent welfare. I was sharply reminded of this need when I saw Government veterinary officers using the same three approaches when visiting each rural farming area, and also medical personnel when introducing new ideas to the communities. Music is a social activity and the workshop format is a means to provide a positive learning experience through participation. In the words of Nketia, ethnomusicologists have a responsibility to present "both a scholarly perspective as historians of musical cultures, and the perspective of music makers who are constantly involved in the creative interpretation of tradition and change" (1991:93).

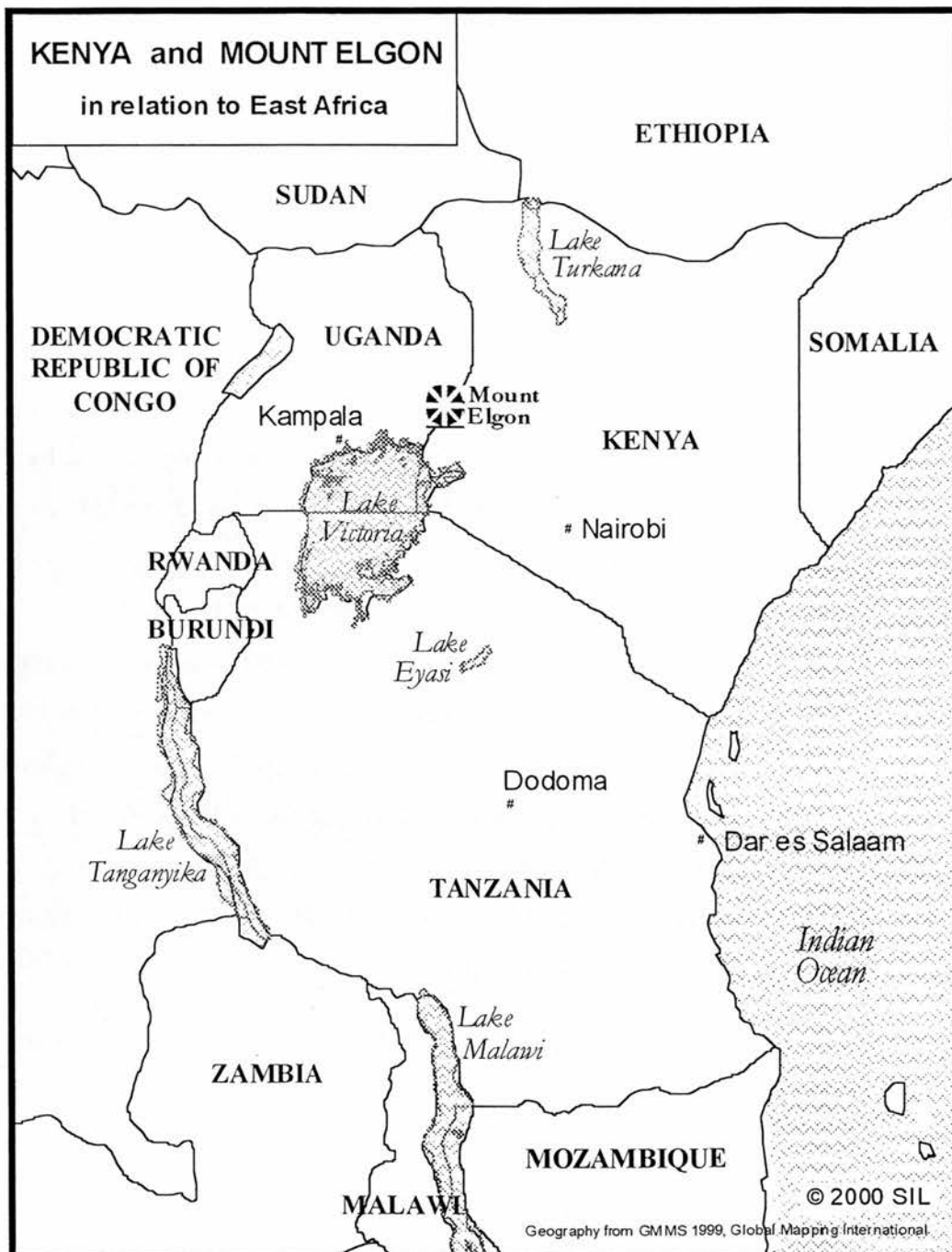
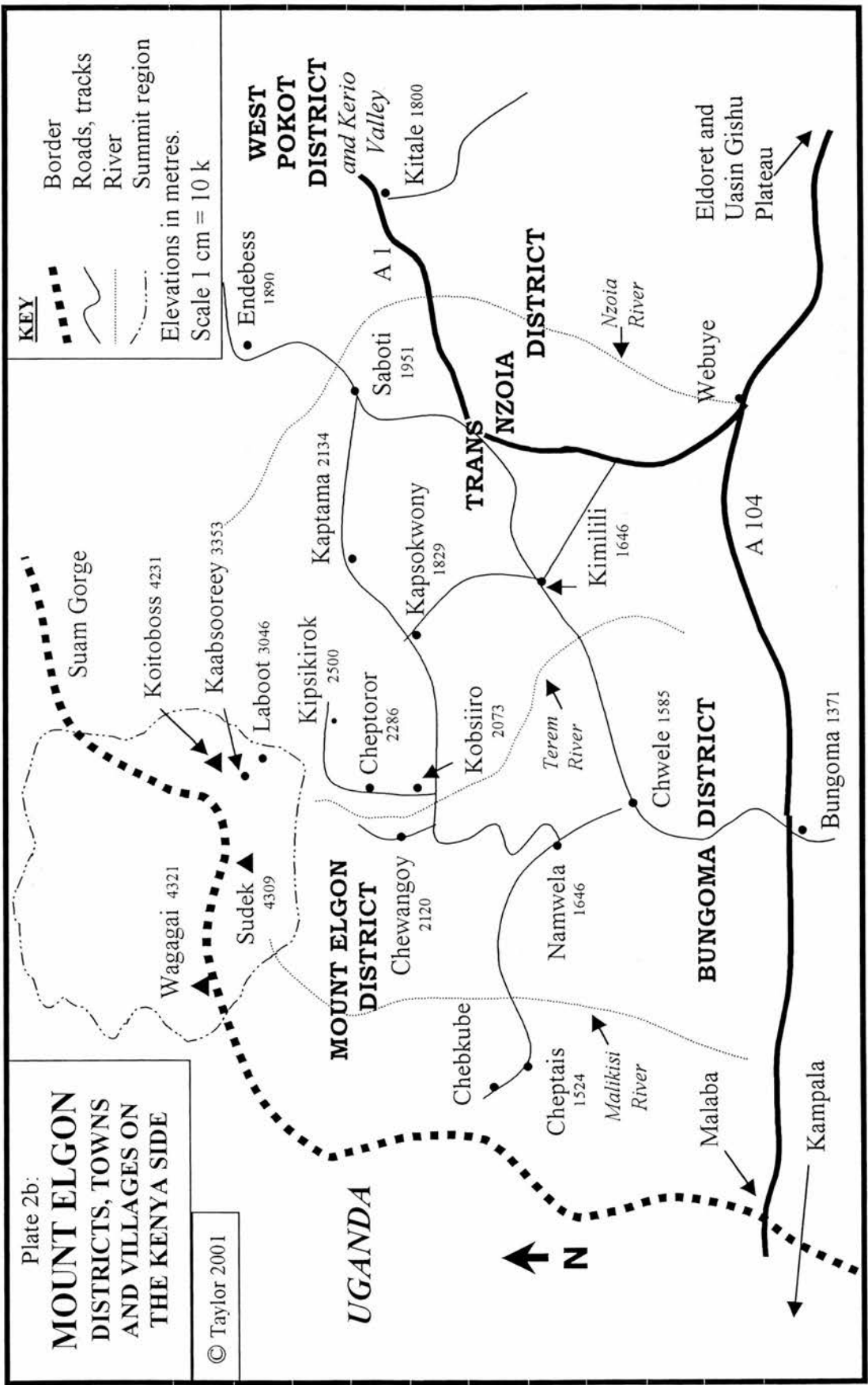
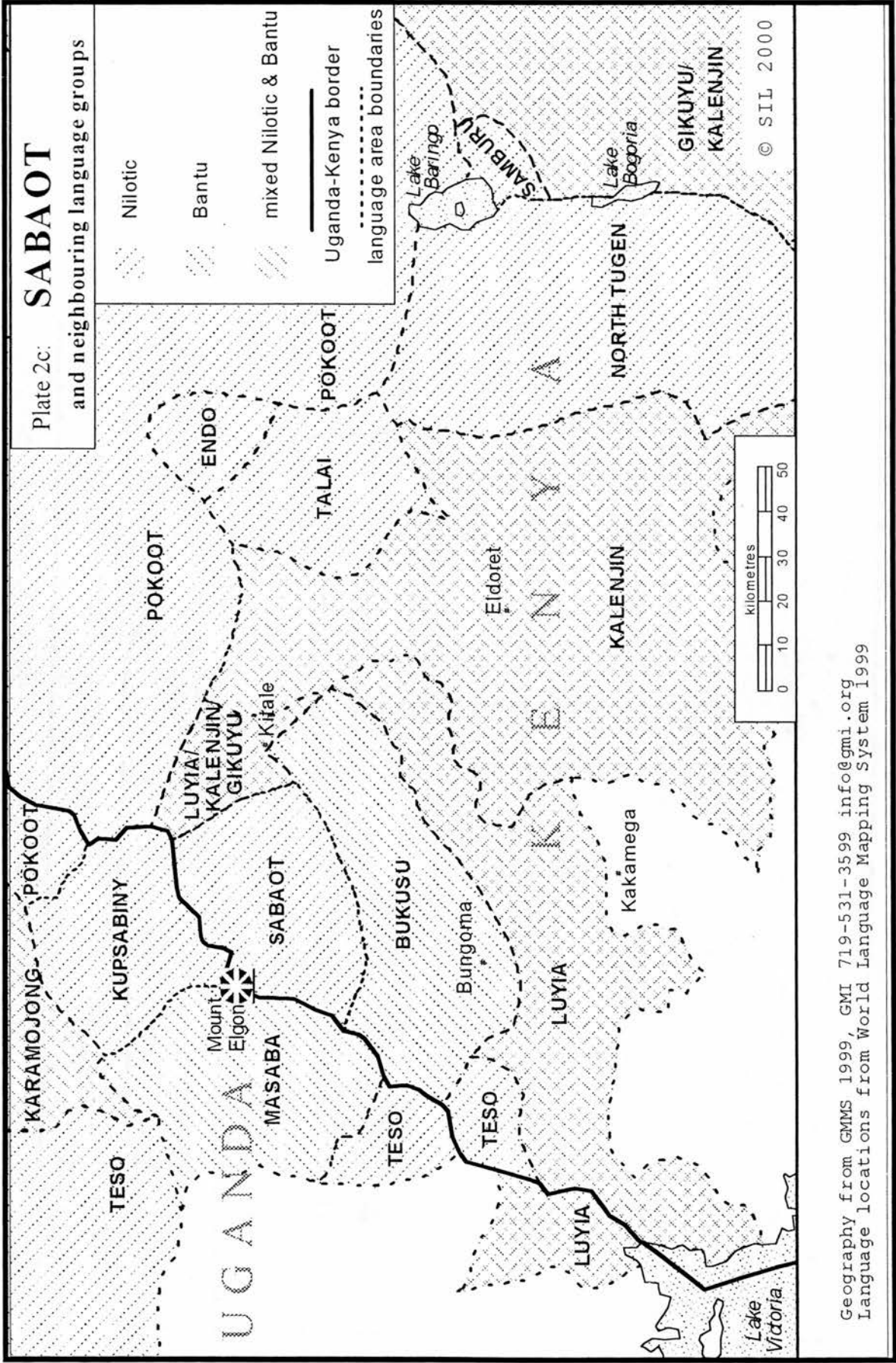


Plate 2a: Kenya and Mt. Elgon in relation to East Africa.







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## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT

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*Kaykay kuyil :ng'wēēnuut kusiir yoo kāyil :mōkōōnkēēt.*

It is better for the hoe's handle to break than for the hoe itself to break.

Protect the important things.

Sabaot proverb

### 2.1 Introduction

A multitude of factors are responsible for shaping ideology and choice of expression amongst the Sabaot people. On the deepest level lie inherent traits and instincts nurtured through centuries, whilst shifting above these are values drawn from the changeability of everyday life. It is impossible to understand changes in musical practice without exploring the surrounding physical and sociological contexts, and a single chapter cannot claim to achieve such a gargantuan task. At best this is a brief overview of goals and values of Sabaot culture over the last fifty years, often without any clear link to music.

### 2.2 Geography and demography

The land of Kenya is home to 122 ethno-linguistic groups, 61 languages, and a total population of 28 million.¹ The majority of Sabaot people live in a compact ethnic concentration on or near the slopes of Mount Elgon, an extinct volcano that straddles the border between western Kenya and Uganda, and which first erupted more than 24 million years ago. The total population of all the related Sabaot dialects in Kenya and Uganda was approximately 300,000 in 1994, of which half comprised the Sabaot on the Kenyan side of the border in the Western and Rift Valley Provinces.

Mount Elgon has the largest surface area of any extinct volcano in the world (50km by 80km) and is the fourth highest mountain range in East Africa after Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and the Ruwenzoris. Explorers in the 1880s reported it being called *El Kony* by the Maasai (meaning 'eye', personified), and through a process of anglicisation, this later became *Elgony* and finally 'Elgon', first used in

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¹ 1999 Kenya Government census, Ethnologue (Grimes 2000), Johnstone and Mandryk (2001). The figures for the separate ethnic groupings in Kenya from the 1999 census were not available at the time of writing.

1885 by Thomson in his book *Through Masai Land*.² The Bagisu of Uganda had already named the mountain *Masaba* ('the father of the tribe'), and the Sebei likewise called it *Masop*, being the personification of an ancestor of their people.³ This did not become known to Europeans until the name Elgon was fully established in use.

There are a number of peaks scattered around the large crater: the highest (Wagagai, 4321 metres) is on the Uganda side, whilst on the Kenya side the highest is Sudek or Little Elgon (previously known as Kiongo) at 4309 metres, followed by Koitoboss at 4231 metres. The latter is also known as *Tēryēēt* (meaning 'mountain top' in Sabaot) or *Kōbmōkōy* ('house of the mongoose'). The base of Mount Elgon rises gently in a number of broad ridges separated by rivers. The largest of these is the Suam (*Swoom* in Sabaot), which leads down from the crater rim in a deep gorge and flows towards the north-east. A second important river divide is the Nzoia, which runs on the eastern side of the mountain down through Webuye, where it is now harnessed for a large paper mill industry. The ridges between these and other smaller rivers are now divided into a concentration of maize and vegetable fields, the edges of which are dotted with the distinctive homes of the Sabaot. Circular in style, they are made of wickerwork plastered with mud, and topped with a conical thatched roof, often having a spike as decoration on the apex (ref. Plate 2d).



Plate 2d: Sabaot conical house

² As reported in Thomas and Lindsell, 1956:113. Linguistic standardisation has resulted in differentiation between long and short vowels, hence Masai is now spelt Maasai.

³ Ref. Goldschmidt, 1976:38.

For the Sabaot to be living on the ridges is a relatively recent development. Prior to the 1970s, most Sabaot were pastoralists and lived in the grassy highland area above the forest belt (ref. Plate 2e). Others were concentrated in interfluvial patterns of family or divisional groups, either close to streams or in cliff-side caves below the escarpment edge. The latter were a source of salt and refuge for wild animals, cattle and people alike, and often had dwellings constructed within them.⁴ Since the 1970s, most of the caves have lain empty owing to these groups moving to the surrounding foothills and lower plateau, but they still occasionally serve as temporary hideouts for stolen cattle. Perhaps the most well known today is *Kituum* cave, subject of scientific investigation in the mid 1990s for the ebola virus.

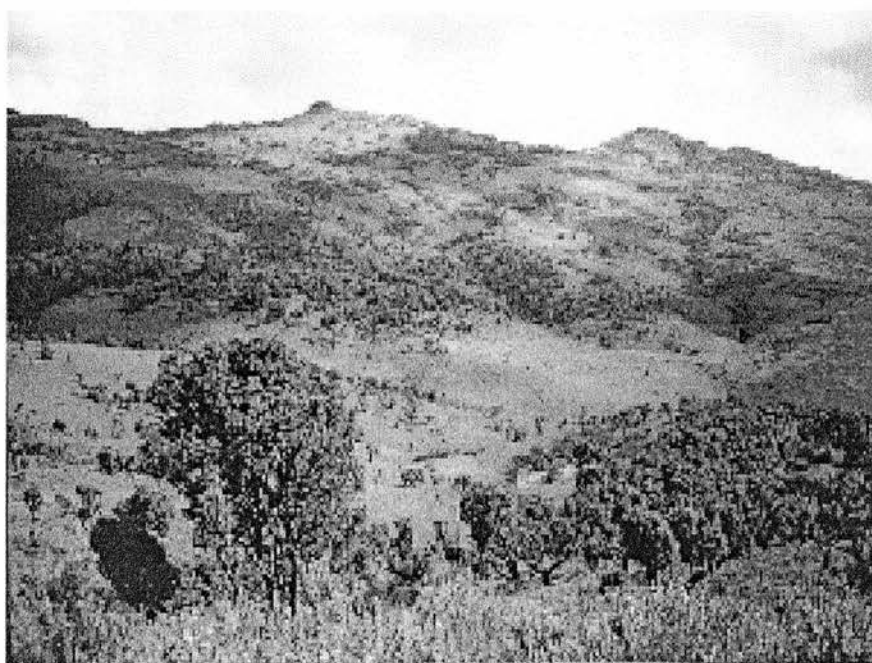


Plate 2e: Upper moorland, former home of *Mosoobiisyēk*

The area of Mount Elgon falls into four physiographic zones which circle the mountain:

(1) the highlands, which cover the upper 1300 metres of the mountain and were formerly home to a group of scattered inhabitants called *Mosoobiisyēk* or 'people from the top'. These numbered fewer than a thousand on the Uganda side,⁵ perhaps a

⁴ There is an account of one such cave at 1965 metres elevation being found deserted by the explorer Joseph Thomson in 1883. "...its inhabitants having been driven away by the Wanandi, inside there stood about thirty huts, oblong in shape" (Ravenstein, 1948:131).

⁵ Goldschmidt, 1976:39.



little more on the Kenya side, and were primarily pastoralists who also relied on honey and forest gathering. Regardless of the fact that these slopes are often cold and shrouded in mist, endemic plant species such as giant lobelia and groundsel abound, and the coarse grass and moorland provide good grazing. The names of some early settlement concentrations in this region are marked on Plate 2b, and reflect the livelihoods of their occupants. *Kaabsooreey*, for example, translates as *kaab* ('home of') + *soor* ('to run to') + *yeey* (oxen), referring to the action of oxen stabbing the ground with their horns before fighting another animal. The *Mosoobiisyēk* remained in the highlands until Government land resettlement schemes in the 1970-80s moved the entire group to lower regions.

(2) the indigenous montane forest belt, which formerly extended to the escarpment area but now lies between the altitudes of 2100 to 3171 metres and is largely uninhabited. Until as recently as the 1970s, trees such as *podo*, *kibēēkēryoontēēt* (Elgon teak), cedars and bamboo were in abundance, supporting a considerable array of wildlife such as elephants, buffaloes, game cats and smaller mammals such as the Blue Monkey, Black and White Colobus Monkey and De-brazza Monkey. Twenty years on, this area is now largely cleared for farming purposes with the exception of a narrow upper band of forest. This widens on the eastern side of the mountain to become Mount Elgon National Park, an area of land totalling 169 sq. km. (established in 1968), which stretches on the Kenya side from the crater rim towards Endebess town, and continues down the Ugandan flanks. Villages include Kobsiirō, Kipsikirok and Kaptama.

(3) the escarpment area, which lies roughly between 1650 and 2100 metres and includes towns such as Kapsokwony, Cheptais, Saboti and Endebess. Here population is more concentrated owing to high levels of cultivation.

(4) the plains or lowland region at the foot of Mount Elgon, which represents the more urbanised area and is bisected by the Eldoret-Malaba highway. Towns include Namwela, Chwele, Kimilili, Bungoma and Kitale, most of which are below 1650 metres elevation. The main languages are Sabaot, Luyia and Swahili. Those in other zones refer to the plains as *Sōōy* and the inhabitants as *Sōōyiisyēk* ('the people from below').

Although these zones are useful for research purposes, most Sabaot dislike the idea of being compartmentalised, preferring to be considered as a single unified group. In reality, the zones have become increasingly blurred since independence (1963) due to the movement of people and changes in land use, so their mention here is only as an initial geographical reference.

From the early 1970s onward, the new policy of agriculturalism resulted in many of the trees outside the boundaries of the National Park being rapidly cleared. Areas such as Kobsiiro were still forested as late as 1972 but today are almost entirely stripped of prize timbers such as Elgon teak. Despite a national protection law, the few remaining specimens face constant threat due to the need for cooking and building materials. Shortage of land has increased the pressure for productivity to such an extent that even the shadow of a tall tree falling across cultivated land is resented.

With few other sources of income, harvest demands are intense and every inch of accessible land on the slopes is now under intense cultivation with cash crops. The inevitable toll means that land once described by local farmers as "one hundred and one percent good" is now over-farmed and poorly conserved. A high yearly rainfall and lack of terracing results in soil leaching, whilst large swathes of red earth reveal extensive erosion on many slopes. A system of rotation may occasionally be employed if a farmer has more than one plot, but again, pressure for land and different growing seasons for different crops means this is uncommon.

Another difficulty in all the higher regions is transporting saleable produce swiftly to markets, as Mount Elgon has never been easily accessible in the areas above 1500 metres in height. Slippery mud tracks are the only connection between many upper areas, and with few vehicles able to manage these, oxen are sometimes used to pull flat wooden sledges down the mountainside laden with potatoes and other heavy crops. Such animals are expensive, so many farmers use donkeys instead.

There are only a handful of tractors on the entire mountain, so land is tilled either with a hand-held *jembe* or else a wooden plough pulled by animals. A handful of murrum roads enable traders and small goods vehicles to reach the trading centres on the escarpment, whilst at the foot of the mountain lies the main Uganda-Kenya



trade route and tarmac roads. The greater ethnic mix here means life-styles are fast adopting urban traits, but facilities such as electricity and telephones have not yet reached above Kapsokwony or Saboti, and it is only the Police Posts and mission centres higher on the mountain which have radios.

When not working in the fields, men often like to sit in groups playing *turaafs* (draughts), exchanging daily information with those passing by. Women work at home or gather outside the village *posho* mill waiting their turn to grind baskets of maize. A few small trading centres can be found along the mountain tracks, clusters of buildings with tin roofs and covered verandahs vaguely reminiscent of the American Wild West. There can even be seen the occasional battery-operated television.

### 2.3 Ethnic origins

In the history of the Sub-Saharan region, migratory movements appear to have matched areas of high rainfall between ca. 9000 and 3000 BC. During this time, savanna type fauna and flora extended into the southern Sahara and the Nile Valley region, and population clusters were situated near rivers and lakes. Such people were once believed to be members of the ethnic group called Nilo-Hamites, of which the 'Hamite' part refers to a supposed liaison with the Eastern Cushites. However, this term is not justified linguistically,⁶ and it is the proto-Southern Nilotes from whom the Kalenjin and Bukusu are now considered descendants.

The extent of influence extended by the Eastern Cushites is still subject to debate. Murdoch (1959) considered the 'Nandi cluster' of Kalenjin speakers to be 'Cushitized Nilotes', and Ehret (1971:36) credited the Cushites with passing on culture traits that are found amongst the Sabaot and Sebei today. These include the formation of clans, age-sets and individual family homesteads, the practice of circumcision rites and the absence of hereditary chieftancy.⁷

A succinct account of the evolution of the ancestors of the Kalenjin in Ochieng's *History of Kenya* (1985) surmises that Nilotic speakers entered Kenya from the north or northwest in two streams, expanding southward as a major force.

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⁶ Greenberg, 1963:85-94, and Ehret, 1971:47.

⁷ For further discussion on this, ref. J.E.G. Sutton, 1966.

The first of these passed the edge of the southern Ethiopian highlands, and the second entered via south-eastern Sudan past the shores of Lake Rudolph (now renamed Lake Turkana). By the time of Christ, these now-called Southern Nilotes occupied the area between Mount Elgon and Lake Victoria,⁸ along with the Bantu who were spreading up from the south. Ehret's study of loan-words shows interaction with Southern Cushites already resident in this same area, although by 1000 AD., the Nilotes were evolving separate identities and had divided into three linguistic sub-groups. These were known as the Highland, Plains (or Rift Valley) and the River-Lake. The Highland Nilotes then divided further, with one group moving to northern Tanzania as the Datooga (Tatoga, Dadog), and the second, proto-Kalenjin, settling around Mount Elgon and referred to as the Sebei.

Many elders amongst the Sabaot relate of a journey made by their ancestors from a country north of Kenya called *Yēēmēētaab Burkēy* (lit: 'warm country'). Others recount a migration out of *Misri* (Arabic/Swahili name for Egypt) led by an ancestor called Kintu, later to become a leader of the Baganda. There are further clues pointing to Egypt: the Sabaot name for their high God is *Asiis*, whereas the Egyptians have a goddess called *Isis*, and there are similarities between Sabaot migration accounts and the Biblical exodus.

"In the beginning all our people lived in the area close to Palestine, but then they began a migration into Africa. On reaching the Red Sea, a Sabaot *Wōōrkooyoontēēt* (prophet) called Kalel Tumbul entered the waters and cried: "So all can cross, the waters of our fathers will now divide and then close". After this happened, he led his people along the Nile through Sudan, and some made their home in Uganda, some in Tanzania, and others continued to Mount Elgon".⁹

The Kipsigis have a similar story about a young man called Kipsoroi who was being chased by enemies and commanded a river to part so he could cross before it closed over his pursuers.¹⁰

The proto-Kalenjin Southern Nilotic culture was adaptable in nature, borrowing and absorbing many features from neighbouring cultures. These included Southern Nilotic principles of grain-agriculture such as cultivation of sorghum and

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⁸ Ehret, 1971:36-38.

⁹ As recorded in conversation with Kisinja, August 1998.

¹⁰ Recounted by Toweett, 1979:3.

*wimbi*, the construction of bee-hives and cultivation of plantains (Bantu), and the Cushitic taboo on eating fish. Livestock-raising was evident well before Christianity reached East Africa,¹¹ and has maintained a high value for these people despite subsequent changes in lifestyle.

Debate continues today over the rectangular style of wood and cattle dung house with flat earth-covered roofs which were used by the highland *Mosoobiisyek*. Few of these dwellings were reported by the first Europeans exploring Mount Elgon in the 1880s, although Goldschmidt (1976:36), an anthropologist who did an extensive study of the Sebei in the 1950s, found them on the western side near the summit. The style and construction were similar to those found among the remnant southern Cushites in Tanzania, and although Goldschmidt (*ibid.*:14-15) concurred with the theory of Cushitic influence, he thought it more likely the low, earth-covered dwellings were a common-sense approach to the cold climate. Another anthropologist called Weatherby (1964:62) believed such dwellings were evidence of a group of people called the Sirikwa, and although the origin of these is uncertain, the Kapsirikwa clan remains today.¹²

The proto-Kalenjin group eventually divided into further communities in the Mount Elgon region, their languages developing sufficiently to be classified as distinct from dialectical variants, yet still recognisably part of the same family. More will be said later on this group of languages, but the name 'Kalenjin' is relatively recent, promoted in the late 1940s by two other non-Bantu language-sets (Nandi and Kipsigis) to distinguish themselves and those with linguistic similarities. It originates from the Nandi conversational starter "*Kāālēēnchiing*" meaning 'I tell you' (Kipkorir, 1973:70-73), which was also popularised as a radio programme logo in the 1950s (Fedders, 1979:47).

The Sabaot are included in this grouping, but their language was initially referred to as 'Mount Elgon Maasai' by explorers in the first half of the 20th century. This later changed to Sabaot shortly after the Uganda Protectorate drew a border

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¹¹ Ehret, 1971:44.

¹² The Sirikwa and Sebei spoke a mutually intelligible language, interacted harmoniously, and are both likely to have been Kalenjin. Excavations by Sutton (1964:69-74) and Chapman (1966:139-148) show the Sirikwa lived in mud-wattle houses nestling in deep depressions now known as Sirikwa holes. They are believed to have dispersed in the face of Maasai attacks circa 1819-1830, moving their livestock up into the forests for safety.

across the summit of Mount Elgon in 1926. In order to encourage unity between the Sabaot dialects on the Kenya side, namely *Book*, *Koony*, *Mosoobiisyēk* and *Bong'omeek*, a suitable name was sought that represented all. There are many theories as to how the name evolved but little consensus as to which is correct. One is that it came from a local saying, "*Soboo tany*", meaning 'the cow keeps me alive', another that it derived from *āboo* ('my son'), referring to a time when the Sabaot were thought to be the last born son of the father of all Kalenjin. The meaning preferred by Goldschmidt (1976:377) is that it derives from the greeting "*Subay!*"

## **2.4 The Mount Elgon *Mosoobiisyēk***

In order to uncover some of the older forms of Sabaot music, the search began at the top of the mountain, a windswept area of grassland bordered on one side by a series of rocky summits and on the other by clumps of bamboo and indigenous forest. It was here that I first became aware of people that other Sabaot referred to by two different names: the *Mosoobiisyēk* (*Mosoob*) and the Ndorobo (Dorobo). Some Sabaot said the term Ndorobo was inaccurate, others used it freely. Many were familiar with the popular creation story that when God created the Maasai in Kenya, he found the Ndorobo already living in the forests.¹³ Others related folk-stories of such people living in the 'high places of God', reputed to have mystical skills such as being able to turn trees into animals.

In terms of classification, Ndorobo is neither a language nor an ethnic group, but a cover-term for a series of population clusters found in forested areas of eastern Africa and identified by lifestyle. In Kenya, these locations are principally the East Mau Escarpment, the Rift Valley area east to Tinderet, and also the north-east to Cherangani and south to Narok. Denyer describes them as "a permeable membrane through which there has been a continual interchange between hunters and surrounding peoples" (1980:480). For this reason they are now more correctly known by the groups to whom they attached, such as the Okiek (Ogiek, Akiek), El Molo, Omotik (Laamoot) and Yaaku. There is no evidence of linguistic commonalities between the various Ndorobo groups: those of the Kinale forest use the Kikuyu

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¹³ For this reason the Kikuyu refer to Ndorobo as 'pioneers' (Daystar University KUPNet Project, 1995:19).

language; those in the Matthews Range speak Samburu; on the Mau Escarpment they speak Maasai; those in the Keringet Forest use Kipsigis; and in the Tinderet Forest they speak Nandi. A group at Ngareta near Narok speak what they claim is the original Ndorobo language, namely Okiek or Kidorobo, but a word comparison carried out here by Shel Arensen in 1996 shows a high count similarity with the nearby Kipsigis.¹⁴

As to the existence of Ndorobo on Mount Elgon, early anthropologists and historians have been divided. Roscoe (1924:85-86) was dismissive, whereas Huntingford (1953:54) believed the cluster of people near the forest line to be Ndorobo historically predating the arrival of other groups such as Maasai and Kikuyu. However, the problem of classification for Mount Elgon inhabitants arises with the name itself, which originally derived from the Maasai term *Il Torobo*, meaning 'poor people without any cattle', and specifically refers to any group of people who rely on hunting, forest gathering and bee keeping for their livelihood. In contrast, the Sabaot of the highland area prided themselves first and foremost on cattle rearing, and resorted to hunter-gathering only when the need arose.

Regardless of earlier inconclusiveness, Ndorobo are not found on Mount Elgon today, and although the term is still used, the majority of Mount Elgon highlanders now prefer to be named either *Mosoob* or *Mosoobiisyēk*, and consider themselves as entirely Sabaot. Perhaps this is a response to historical stigma attached to Ndorobo people in Africa, which has included typecast accusations of being 'animals', paradigms of disorder, amoral, worthless, or socially and physically marginalised (Huntingford, 1951:37). The lowland *Sōōyiisyēk* are not exempt from making such castigations, and relate jokes playing on their own highlander brothers as the 'slow ones', lacking in hospitality or any desire to mix socially. "If a Ndorobo is coming in your direction and sees you from afar, he will begin walking backwards whilst looking for a bush to hide".¹⁵

However, there is clearly a strong kinship bond amongst all Sabaot, regardless of location, minor differences in dialect, types of food eaten, subject material of songs, ceremonies, house styles or farming methods. The life-style of the

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¹⁴ "Out of 110 words, about 90 were the same as Kipsigis, about 10 were the same as Maasai and about 10 were different". Information from personal memo, Shel Arensen, 6 October 1997.

¹⁵ As recounted by a *Sōōyiisyēk* elder, name withheld for confidentiality.



*Mosoobiisyēk* has never been sufficiently different from other Sabaot to support a theory of racial separateness, and the lowland Sabaot, joking apart, have always said "they are just one of us".

As the *Mosoob* and *Koony* dialects are closely related, speakers of *Mosoob* are often consulted by linguists in the search for examples of 'pure' *Koony* that has not absorbed influences from *Book* dialects. The *Mosoobiisyēk* are also considered by other Sabaot as being able to "express very nicely". It is clear that here, protected in part by geographical isolation, is the richest remaining source of Sabaot traditional musical heritage, and the significance of the *Mosoobiisyēk* group should not be diluted by arguments of classification. These people have retained traditions long after they have ceased lower down the mountain, such as the women wearing leather skirts (*sērēkoonik*) for certain ceremonies (ref. Plate 2f), and both men and women carrying long sticks to remind themselves of the spears once used.



Plate 2f: *Mosoobiisyēk* women wearing *sērēkoonik*

In addition, there are a number of accomplished players of the *bukantiit* amongst the *Mosoobiisyēk*, and their songs have been used in this thesis as the core reference in sampling from the mountain. Consulting the *Mosoobiisyēk* for a traditional perspective should not imply that they are considered backward or underdeveloped in any way. They are the guardians of a unique culture, despite rubbing shoulders with both *Sōōyiisyēk* and other ethnic influences.



## 2.5 Exploration and migration patterns on Mount Elgon, 19th century onwards

Kenya can never claim to be a product of isolation, as it shares borders with no less than five different countries, namely Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania. In addition to these, on the east it borders the Indian Ocean, whilst in the west, Kenya shares the shores of the largest inland freshwater mass of water, Lake Victoria. Cultural exchange from all these sources has been inevitable, and a variety of influences, including musical, have infused Kenya over the centuries (ref. Plate 2a).

The first Europeans known to visit Mount Elgon were the British explorers Joseph Thomson and James Martin, who reached Lake Victoria in 1883 from Mombasa after travelling safely through the highlands dominated by the Maasai. In December of that year, Thomson met with Chief Kimēēnkich of the *Bong'omeek* dialect, and explored some of the local caves on Mount Elgon. Soon after, various Arab and Swahili caravan routes opened up from the coast to the interior, and the British East Africa Company team of Sir Frederick J.D. Jackson and Ernest Gedge became the first to ascend Mount Elgon's summit from the north side of the mountain in 1890.

The traditional Elgon *Wōōrkooyoontēēt* known as Arap Koburrkoin had earlier warned of "people with no skin coming to this country, holding fire in their mouth and having clothing like butterflies" (Weatherby, 1962:208). This referred to the arrival of white explorers who wore cloth rather than animal skins and smoked cigarettes, and was echoed by prophets from other tribes such as the Kikuyu.

A further prophecy of this time related to the increase in languages, saying "people who do not understand each other's language will pass one another on journeys". However, these were not seen as reasons to resist the coming of white people, the exception being game hunters who, drawn by the wide variety of animal life in the forest areas, were soon regarded by the Sabaot as a curse from *Yēyiintēēt*, God the creator.

Another fundamental influence on the cultural expression of nearly every language-set in Kenya has been the church, but in the case of the Sabaot, this was relatively late in coming. The earliest to make any significant impact were the

Quakers, who arrived in the Kaptama area in the 1930s and opened a school.¹⁶ In the 1980s, a number of Finnish missionaries assisted the construction of Kipsigon Hospital near Kobsiir, and in 1981, a Danish couple, Iver and Alice Larsen, settled on the mountain as the first resident missionaries. Their aim was to assist a Bible translation and literacy programme in the Sabaot language, and the New Testament was completed in 1997.¹⁷

Soon after their arrival, Father Martin Wijk moved from Uganda to begin a Catholic mission in Kibuk, and due to his interest in architecture, a number of schools and small churches were subsequently sponsored and built in the area. Mission efforts were greatly appreciated by the Sabaot for their provision of community facilities, and missionaries were seen in a far more positive category than those responsible for colonial land policies.

### **2.5.1 Land policies affecting the Sabaot**

The development of land policies straddles two political time frames, namely pre- and post-independence.

#### Pre-1963

During the entire nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the inhabitants of Mount Elgon were in conflict with cattle raiders from neighbouring tribes. The earliest documented were Maasai from the east in 1819, and major incursions by the 'Karimojong' occurred in 1830, 1849, 1850, 1869, 1870 and 1894, mostly from the northern flanks. The Sabaot reciprocated with raiding parties of their own, and captured animals were often driven at night through forest and cave areas. Before the final boundary demarcation between Kenya and Uganda was settled in 1926, there was free movement of people between the two countries, and also between the various Kalenjin tribal areas in Kenya. The large rivers of Suam and Nzoia were both sufficiently shallow for cattle to cross, and there were few geographical deterrents for raiders.

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¹⁶ As recounted by G. Kipsisey. Mission influence began much earlier amongst other Kalenjin groups, such as the Kipsigis (1905).

¹⁷ A BTL project. The Old Testament is currently in progress.

The last major encounter with the Karimojong' was reportedly in 1909, when Sabaot from the northern flanks of Elgon converged to attack cattle bomas of the Karimojong' on the lower slopes. Cordial relationships between the Sabaot and other Kalenjin peoples did not preclude them raiding one another, and the Nandi are documented as having attacked the Sabaot in 1850, 1860, 1875, 1889, 1898 and 1904. So highly prized were the *Mosoobiisyēk* cattle that invading warriors often climbed to altitudes of 3000 metres or higher in search of scattered pastoral groups who had moved to the upper slopes so as to be out of reach of livestock raiders. Many of these raids are documented by Weatherby (1962:200-212), and although they diminished in frequency after a British punitive expedition of 1905-6, the Karimojong' are still occasionally active in this area.

British colonial interest in East Africa gradually expanded through various commercial and religious ventures, intensifying from the mid-nineteenth century onwards until the establishment of British Protectorates in Uganda (1890) and Kenya (1895) respectively. The area north-east of Lake Victoria, including Mount Elgon and extending up to Lake Turkana (then called Lake Rudolph), remained under the Uganda Protectorate until 1902. During this time of transition, the British led five military expeditions against the Nandi in an effort to quell their raids on neighbouring tribes and trading caravans. Reluctant to expend money on military campaigns, the British aimed instead to demonstrate that colonial rule ensured protection from tribal wars.

The forays of early white settlers in Kenya brought favourable reports concerning the fertile farming opportunities of the land north of Nairobi stretching to the Uganda border. In particular, the south-eastern base of Mount Elgon stretching from Kitale (formerly called *Kataleel*, meaning 'a place of white thorns', after *kateet* or *kata* meaning 'thorn' and *lēēl* meaning 'white') to the River Terem was found to be good for maize, wheat and dairy farming. In contrast, land and the cultivation of grains amongst the Sabaot was less valued than livestock rearing. There was no concept of private land ownership or even clan lands, as grazing was plentiful both on the mountain and in the lowlands. Responsibility for allocation of plots and the organisation of communal clearing efforts was left to the local *kōkwēēt* (council of village elders).

When the Uganda Railway reached Lake Victoria in 1901, the East Africa Protectorate decided that crop production for export would finance the further extension to Eldoret on the Uasin Gishu plateau and ultimately to Kampala in Uganda. They began to seriously encourage the settlement of European farmers in this region, and Africans already living in this area were officially 'alienated' and moved into demarcated reserves, allowing settlers to be allocated lowland plots. This was under the terms of the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, and included exclusive ownership and ninety-nine year leases. The term 'white highlands' came into being in 1907, following a pledge by Lord Elgin, Secretary of State for the colonies, that these areas should be designated for European farming. In 1912, the area which was later to become the District of Trans Nzoia was opened to European settlement, and grazing land for pastoralists was severely restricted in order that local Africans would willingly become labourers on settler farms.

Those Sabaot living on the mountain were largely unaffected as yet, and several elders such as Kisinja and Kororio saw no white people until the 1920s. However, in the ensuing years of British colonialism, the rapid acquisition of large lowland areas for farming took little account of the Sabaot preference for cattle raising, and *Sōōyiisyeḱ* herders began to move upwards in search of alternative grazing areas. It was not long before a period of land conflict began, with upland Sabaot protesting at the sudden influx of grazers, and lowland Sabaot upset at losing their land.

Meanwhile, the British export focus on maize, coffee and sisal crops was leading to dangerous levels of monoculture. Consequently, there was little resistance in the highlands to a series of locust invasions, rinderpest epidemics and drought. As the economy soured, further attempts were made to induce the Sabaot to abandon their pastoral ways and switch to 'progressive' farming to boost exports. By encouraging greater diversification of market produce, it was hoped to lift the colony of Kenya¹⁸ out of increasing economic depression.

In terms of land use, the Government had long seen pastoralism as unproductive, and compulsory selling of livestock for slaughter was now introduced as an additional agricultural incentive, along with greater efforts to encourage the

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¹⁸ Created from the British East Africa Protectorate in 1920.

Sabaot to either grow supplementary crops or become labourers on settler farms. Resistance continued amongst the lowland Sabaot to such alien livelihoods, and they continued moving their cattle up the slopes of Elgon. Despite the setting up in 1932 of the Kenya Land Commission under William Morris Carter to handle lowland compensation claims, delays in settlements became an increasing source of resentment. This was further aggravated when the same Commission recommended Europeans be given security of tenure in the white highlands (Maxon, 1986:203), and the period between 1900-1940 was a time of increasing discontent amongst the Sabaot in which the theme was "get moving... anywhere!"¹⁹

In 1960, sensing the approach of Kenyan nationalisation, the first Lancaster House Conference in London announced the intention of liquidating European settlement in Kenya and introduced majority rule based on universal suffrage. In 1960-61 a system nicknamed the "million acre scheme" was implemented, in which approximately one-sixth of the white highlands was bought by the Government to be subsequently divided into plots and redistributed as smallholdings to African farmers. A considerable number of white farmers either left the Kitale/ Trans Nzoia area at this time or else sold their farms intact to African large-scale farmers. On the 12 December 1963, Kenya became an independent nation, with Jomo Kenyatta as its first Prime Minister.

There is one irony of Kenya's traditional heritage under colonialism. In the political frictions prior to independence, any meeting having more than six people required official permission lest it be considered a "potential source of organisation against the coloniser" (Ochieng', 1990:210). This meant that any funeral, wedding or ceremonial occasion could be broken up, and although the rule was seldom enforced out of fear of repercussions, it raised awareness amongst the colonised of the very thing which was being repressed, namely cultural expression. It also proved a boost for traditional songs amongst the Sabaot, who were already indignant at the problems they were facing in other areas of their lives.

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¹⁹ As recounted by Kipsisey, Nairobi, March 2000.



### Post-Uhuru (1963 onwards)

Britain's transfer of power and independence to Kenyans in 1963 is commonly known as *Uhuru* (Swahili for 'freedom'), but initially failed to bring the solutions the Sabaot had been hoping for. In the late 1960s it was announced that a Government research plan to farm oats on the Mount Elgon highlands would necessitate the *Mosoobiisyēk* voluntarily moving to lower ground and learning to plough and plant. This was promoted as a 'development' programme, although the truth may have been that it was an attempt to forestall the troublesome cattle raids from the Ugandan side, which the border had done little to prevent. Despite the raiding problems, moving down from the moorlands and upper escarpment area was an unpopular option for the *Mosoobiisyēk*, and to the dismay of the Government, few responded. Those that did were more used to roaming with their cattle than settling down to farm, and it was not long before many of them sold their newly acquired land to the *Sōōyiisyēk*, and headed back to highland grazing areas.

In 1971, President Jomo Kenyatta decided to further encourage the 'voluntary' exodus of *Mosoobiisyēk* from the highland areas. A committee was set up to define the criteria of distribution, and every family head was allocated a fifty-acre plot below the forest line. Tensions rose over the implementation of this, to the extent that Kenya's second President, Daniel arap Moi decided to redefine the acreage awarded.²⁰ It was now to be five acres to all male *Mosoobiisyēk* over eighteen years old. By the mid 1980s, every village above 3000 metres on the Survey of Kenya map (Kenya Government 1985) was deserted, although many reluctant pastoralists longed to return.

The problems on Mount Elgon were not confined to the Sabaot people alone. When the lowland Sabaot began moving away from the agricultural farm areas, the settlers had to import alternative labour. They brought in large numbers of Ugandans from Bugisu Province, creating ethnic concentrations in Namwela and Trans Nzoia District. Although there had previously been few representatives of other ethnic groups living anywhere on the mountain, many were now converging on the fertile lowland areas. These included the Bukusu, Teso, Kikuyu, and related Kalenjin

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²⁰ Many Sabaot today have family members who were involved in this land-shift. President Moi succeeded Kenyatta in August 1978.



groups of Nandi and Kipsigis, all of whom began to claim Mount Elgon as their motherland and to demand land allocation rights.

The Sabaot have always strongly believed the mountain to be their heritage, and in 1992, violent clashes erupted, leading to injuries, property damage and cattle thieving. A year later, the Government divided the existing Bungoma District to create a new District known as Mount Elgon, thus separating the administration and pacifying the dispute. This meant there were now six Districts on or around Mount Elgon (listed in chapter 1.6.1), these in turn being divided into Divisions each with its own Chief, and then into Zones.

Today, constitutional laws allow Kenyans freedom to reside anywhere in their country, which means that pressures for available fertile land continue to increase. Despite accepting that the Government has their interests at heart,²¹ many Sabaot consider the problem of land allocation to have been given insufficient attention. The undercurrent of feeling amongst the highland dwellers is that other ethnic groups on the mountain are being favoured in land redistribution, a suspicion that rankles far more amongst those with no land to call their own.

In summary, the consequence of land issues has meant changes for every level of Sabaot society. Those without land have little manual work to do during the day and social problems are on the increase. Family heads have traditionally subdivided their land amongst their sons, but many plots on the mountain have been fragmented into uneconomic units and can no longer support subdivision. As the problem of shrinking land resources becomes more evident, sons are moving away from their family groups to rent or purchase land elsewhere. Trans Nzoia is now one of the few areas where land can still be bought, although it remains a dream for many Sabaot.

## 2.6 Languages used on Mount Elgon

There are several languages in use on the slopes and foothills of Mount Elgon, of which the predominant one is Sabaot. In the *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000), Sabaot is

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²¹ In 1999, the Government made a public response to petitions for additional forestry to be cleared, announcing that it would extend the Chebyuk resettlement scheme of the 1970s and degazette "an unspecified acreage of Mount Elgon forest" in order to settle an additional 1,000 landless *Mosoobiisyeŋk* families. This report from Kenya's *Daily Nation* newspaper, January 22, 1999.

classified as sharing characteristics of the Southern Nilotic language-set, a collective name for several related ethnic groups originating from around the Nile. In more general linguistic referrals, Sabaot forms the westernmost part of the Kalenjin group in Kenya, other members of the group being Pokot (Pökoot),²² Elgeyo (Keiyo), Nandi (also known as Cemual), Kipsigis, Tugen (Tuken), Marakwet, Cherangany and Terik (or Nyang'ori) language speakers. This grouping is often referred to as the Highland Nilotes, whereas the Turkana, Teso, Maasai, Samburu and Njemps peoples comprise the Plains Nilotes, and the Luo make up the River-Lake Nilotes.

Of the six Districts around Mount Elgon, Sabaot is the predominant tongue spoken in the Mount Elgon District (Western Province), but gradually decreases in use through Trans-Nzoia District (Rift Valley Province) and Bungoma District (Western Province). It is well understood in Sebei District (being related to *Kubsābiiny*) but has only minimal use in the Districts of West Pokot and Uasin Gishu. In 1999, it was estimated that Cheptais (in the south-west) had approximately 75% Sabaot, 15% Bukusu, and a 10% mix of Teso, Kikuyu and Luo speakers.²³ The southern trading towns of Namwela, Chwele, Kimilili and Bungoma had larger numbers of Bukusu, whereas towns further east such as Endebess and Kitale had a majority of Nandi, Pokot, Teso, and Sebei.

The Sabaot-speaking area is surrounded by a number of Bantu language-sets as can be seen on Plate 2c. To the east in the Rift Valley Province are speakers of the Endo language (also known as Marakwet, although this is a cover term for a number of variants), who have low intelligibility with the major Kalenjin dialects. To the north-east there are the languages of Gikuyu (Bantu language-set), Kalenjin (a language in its own right, found in the para-Nilotic group) and Luyia (also Bantu), whilst to the east and south are the Bukusu and Luyia (both Bantu).

### **2.6.1 Sabaot dialects**

The Sabaot language comprises a number of inter-related dialects that are mutually understood by all Sabaot speakers owing to minimal differences. As can be seen from the diagram below, the dialects fall into two main area groupings, the members

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²² Spelling variants are given in brackets.

²³ Statistics supplied by regional BTL personnel.

of each being closely related. The largest grouping comprises *Koony* (*Kony*) which has the most speakers and is therefore considered by linguists to be more resistant to change. Also in the same grouping are *SoomEEK*²⁴ (*Somek*, *Sōōmēēk*), *Mosoob* (*Māsāāb*, *Masob*, *Musob*) and *Kubsābiiny* (*Sabiny*, *Kupsabiny*, *Sābiiny*), the latter predominating amongst the Sebei on the Uganda side.

Speakers of dialects in the second grouping are mostly centred around the Western lowlands, and are predominantly *Book* (*Bok*, *Pok*, or called *Walako* by the Bukusu) and *Bong'omeek* (*Bongo'mek*, *Bong'om*, *Pong'om*), although the latter is now heavily influenced by neighbouring Bukusu speakers.²⁵

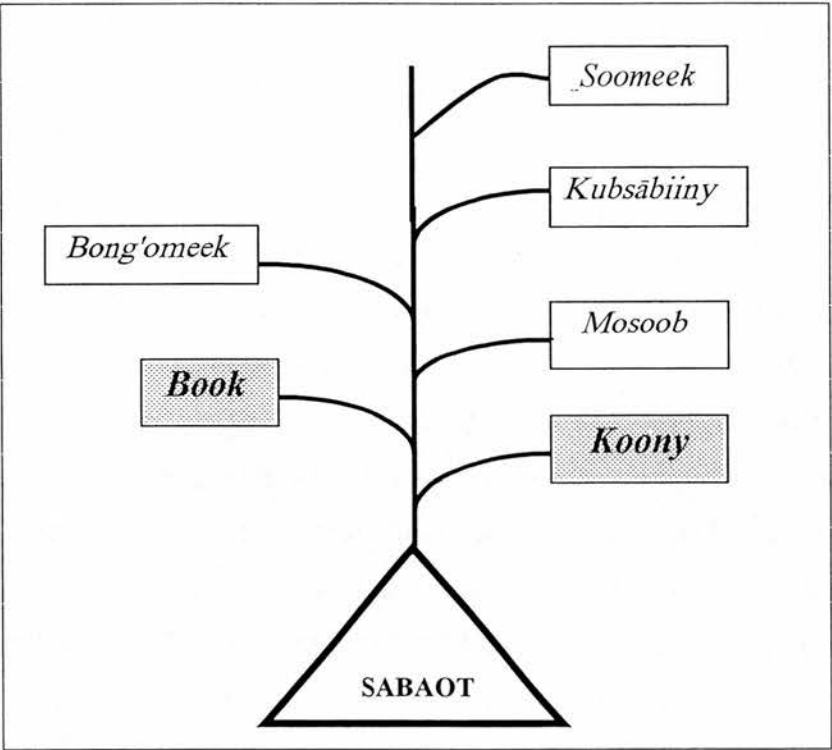


Plate 2g: Dialects of the Sabaot language

When Sabaot Bible Translation and Literacy (SBTL, part of the larger BTL organisation) undertook linguistic surveys, they found that the above dialects had been largely assimilated into two primary dialects, those of *Koony* and *Book*. In addition, they have found that Sabaot speakers tend to mix dialects in everyday speech, switching from one to another according to the occasion or to whom they are

²⁴ The *SoomEEK* dialect group claim to have been the true Sabaot cave-dwellers (Weatherby 1966:93).

²⁵ It is listed as an endangered 'language' in Wurm (ed., 1996).

speaking. In 1981, SBTL made the decision in consultation with Sabaot mixed-dialect committees to focus on the *Koony* dialect for the translation of the Bible and education purposes.

The language of *Kubsābiiny* on the Uganda side of Mount Elgon is now considered a vernacular in its own right (Grimes, 2000), although often erroneously referred to as 'Sebei'. Early historians and anthropologists have erroneously used Sebei as a cover term to include *all* the dialects and clans in the circum-Elgon area, whereas it more correctly refers to the people who speak *Kubsābiiny*.²⁶ What is more important is that, despite the interim years of political divisions, this entire cluster of *Koony*, *Book* and *Kubsābiiny* speakers still consider themselves and their ancestors as one people group, and maintain considerable intermarriage and cross-border movement. They share sociological features such as an exogamous clan system, age-sets, and the *bōrōryēēt* units, which continue to bind these different dialect groups together.

The debate whether mother tongue languages should be taught in Kenyan schools is split: some argue for the vernacular whilst others see the future in modern languages. "I want my children to learn a language that will enable them to go places, not one that will keep them in a museum".²⁷ The reality is that world pressure will increasingly dictate how nations should communicate. As yet, the language of Sabaot stands strong because many children continue to learn it from their parents, but endangered status may someday become reality for this and other minority languages. It is no bad thing that young people are adding new words to the language as this shows it is flexible and meeting new needs.

The New Testament in Sabaot has only been available since 1997, but indications are that more pastors are now using it in preference to Swahili, particularly as they see the benefits in comprehension amongst their 'flock'. Within home and community, many Sabaot prefer to use their mother tongue for communicating deeper issues.

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²⁶ A morphology study of this language was completed by C. A. Montgomery in 1966. *Kubsābiiny* has the sub-dialects of *Sor* in the central area and *Mbai* in the west.

²⁷ From an article by Kwamboka Oyaro, "Speaking in Tongues", *Daily Nation*, 25 February 2000.

## 2.6.2 Swahili

Initially concentrated in the region of the East Coast of Africa, Swahili has now spread across Tanzania, Kenya, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Somalia and Zambia. It is also used in Uganda, but to a lesser degree.²⁸ Within Kenya, its spread is more assured by having few direct associations with power or any particular ethnic group, hence it poses no threat to unity.

It was encouraged by European settlers with the aim of unifying communication amongst the many people groups and now predominates in any situation where a common tongue is needed. Government officials and drafted school teachers prefer it, and local Chiefs often switch to Swahili when holding their community *baraza* (council meetings). Larsen, in his initial research amongst the Sabaot, concluded: "To know Swahili is considered a necessity especially among the men.... about 80% are subordinate bilingual, with 10% coordinate bilingual, 5% incipient bilingual and 5% monolingual (all estimates)".²⁹

Throughout Kenya, Swahili has also been widely used by missionaries as the language of Christian evangelization. Most theological training institutions prefer a combination of English and Swahili, and it is not surprising that religious leaders amongst the Sabaot frequently use these same languages for the purposes of teaching and worship.

## 2.6.3 English

English was instituted for higher education and commerce by the British administration in Kenya after the 1914-1918 war. For the Sabaot it is still very much the third language choice, but as education opportunities increase, so does the use of English amongst the younger people. The consensus of its value for wider communication purposes is also growing, and there is an expectation that people with education use the languages of wider communication.

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²⁸ This is owing to negative historical associations of the slave trade, the influx of Islam, and because it is the language adopted by army and police. In addition, "the simplified forms used for trading and giving orders struck people as inferior" (Maw, 1985:xix).

²⁹ Taken from I. Larsen's "Summary of Sabaot Research Questionnaire", April 1986, Nairobi: BTL. These figures are for speech preference rather than literacy.



In Kenya there are still some reminders that English was the colonisers' language,³⁰ although there are no directly negative colonial feelings amongst the Sabaot people as a whole. There *are* grievances over unfinished promises made prior to the hand-over from colonial to Kenyan governance, but these are directed more to the national Government of today than to colonial administration.

As yet, there are relatively few songs or hymns sung in English amongst the Sabaot, and many established traditional singers (such as Kisinja, Kororio, Chelasia and Kinyokye) have no songs with English lyrics in their repertoire.

## **2.7 Economy and subsistence patterns of the Sabaot**

Prior to the move down the mountain, the *Mosoobiisyēk* occasionally hunted forest game such as elephant, buffalo, antelope, and wild pigs. Monkeys were also caught, not for food, but for their much prized skins and tails which were worn on ceremonial occasions such as circumcision. When the hunting of wild animals was banned throughout Kenya in 1977, poaching of buffalo, antelope and even the occasional elephant continued to supplement *Mosoobiisyēk* diets on rare occasions, although most of the remaining game eventually retreated to the National Reserve areas on Mount Elgon. Barter trade was mostly cattle, along with items such as wooden beehives, bamboo baskets, arrows, spears, and shields of cow and buffalo skin.

As the primary economic activity of the Sabaot has changed from pastoralism to mixed farming over the last thirty years, the main income crops have become maize, beans, onions, sorghum, millet, sweet and Irish potatoes, peas, tomatoes, cabbage, sugarcane, coffee and pyrethium (used for insecticide). A few tea and coffee plantations exist lower on the mountain (mostly around Cheptais and Kibuk). The local economy revolves around seasonal rainfall, this being normally plentiful on the mountain between the months of March to May and July to September. The harvesting of 'long' crops such as maize runs from September to December, depending on the altitude, whilst 'short' crops are ready in June and July.³¹ Produce is then transported to lowland markets and sold for cash.

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³⁰ Such as legal terminology and signs on railway platforms.

³¹ Long crops need a full season to grow. Short crops include perennials such as beans, onions, potatoes, cabbage and bananas.



Very few crops are kept for local consumption, which has led to severe food problems in the past when rains have failed. In the early 1900s, the Kenya highlands were subject to a series of hardships, beginning with severe droughts between 1919-21. This period was nicknamed "the hunger of the *motakaa*" ('car', Swahili) as the first vehicles were seen in Kenya during this time. Other disasters such as major locust invasions between 1928-34 devastated crops and pastures, followed by a smallpox epidemic in the 1940s and a rinderpest outbreak in which many animals died. All of these had considerable effect on the Sabaot in their state of pre-arable dependency. Finally came the land-shifts of the 1970s. Many Sabaot knew the transition down the mountain would not be easy, fearing "their culture and cows would become rotten", but despite the difficulties, inevitably their lives have developed new patterns and rhythms.

Paid employment on the mountain is minimal, but the Sabaot are fast learning to become traders and wholesalers, with self-employed ventures such as small stores, cafes (known as *hoteli*) and carpentry. Those who have been fortunate enough to complete secondary or tertiary education often leave the mountain and seek employment through teaching, small businesses, or by joining the army and police. Whilst away, they are expected to support their extended family back on the mountain, particularly in education, health and upgrading homes with corrugated iron roofs.

Personal wealth is still gauged by the number of cattle a family owns. The average yearly turnover for a farming man on the mountain is about £300 (at 1998 exchange rates), although this depends on the amount of land worked and the type of crops grown. Most farmers would like to own a pair of oxen for ploughing or pulling wooden sledges laden with produce to market, at least one milk cow and a few sheep (the Sabaot prefer sheep to goats as they require less land for grazing). However, the average small farm will never achieve this, having instead one or two donkeys and perhaps some chickens.

Many work activities are gender-orientated. Ploughing and construction of house frames is done by men, whereas women are expected to weed, help in planting and harvesting, collect firewood, carry water, and be keepers of home, children and livestock. Clearing of land can be done by either sex, but about 20% of farmers,

particularly those with more land and some management ability, are able to afford a few casual workers.

The primary economic objective of younger Sabaot men is to be able to buy their own *shamba* (plot of farm-land), especially as women do not consider a man worth marrying unless he owns land. Bernard Chuma Mulunda (born in 1966) is but one example, at present owning only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre and renting another 3 acres some distance from his home. He hopes to become a profitable farmer on the mountain, but if roads and electricity do not come soon, he may move to Kapsokwony. He will then have joined the steadily increasing exodus that seeks employment within the towns, hoping to eventually afford a bicycle or motor bike. Those at school aspire to become teachers or doctors, but the reality is that few can afford to complete secondary level, let alone take higher training. Sabaot musicians who can play the guitar may try their hand as 'entertainers' in towns, but the competition is fierce and there are few success stories.

Those Sabaot who have acquired both land and families have other priorities, the first being school fees. Although primary schooling is free throughout Kenya, there are hidden costs such as books and uniforms, school trips and sports equipment. Any remaining money goes towards the purchase of cattle, seeds, fertiliser, foodstuffs or *mabati* (corrugated iron for roofing). Unexpected costs such as medical bills for treatment at local clinics are seldom budgeted for, and people borrow money when needed or sell an animal. Whereas ten years ago it was customary to barter, now loans with minimal interest are available through local co-operative societies. Banks, on the other hand, are still a new concept for most Sabaot and most people spend as they earn, the ethos being "live now, struggle later".

When times are hard, personal belongings, work animals and food are lent amongst community members, with close account taken of who owes what. Repayment often depends on the next harvest, but during communal occasions such as funerals and circumcision ceremonies, firewood and food are given free and repayment is not expected. It is also acceptable for an owner to lend cattle to his neighbours as a basic means of insurance, minimising his chances of loss by famine, disease or theft.

Despite these communal acts, the national concept of *harambee*, or 'pulling together' when members of the community face problems, appears to be losing popularity. People are functioning more within their family circle rather than voluntarily working together on projects. Times of increased tension are the exception, such as the 1992 land clashes when the *Mosoobiisyēk* united strongly with the lowland Sabaot to become "Sabaot versus Bukusu". There is also a strong bond between members of the same age-set, shown in this Sabaot proverb:

*Yoo kuuru :binta tyēēnto mächē iyēnē :nkinyiing'.*  
*When your age-set leads a song, you must also respond.*

'Song' in this case means that when the men of your age-set start some public work, you are expected to participate.

Leisure time on working days is generally taken in the late afternoon, with activities dependent on whether a person is a church-goer or not. Christian interviewees concurred in derogatory manner that those "not saved" were addicts of the potent and illegal home-brew called *mayyeek*.³² It was difficult to find people who would confess to being 'non-Christian', but the few who were prepared to say so pointed out that even Christians used snuff and cigarettes despite these being frowned on by the church.

## **2.8 Education and literacy development amongst the Sabaot**

The history and culture of the Sabaot has been passed through many generations by means of informal oral techniques, apprenticeship and observation systems. Within families, grandparents have been the source of clan history and morality advice, preparing young people for rites of passage such as circumcision and marriage. With the advent of schools, this role has been largely transferred to teachers, many of whom originate from other locations and cultural backgrounds and are unfamiliar with Sabaot traditions. In addition, much of Kenyan school education is constructed on a European template, and instruction in area-specific cultures is falling between the cracks. Children in boarding schools have little opportunity to interact with their grandparents, and when at home, the acquisition of skills in farming and cooking takes much of their time.

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³² Made from maize flour and millet yeast, and known as *busaa* in the market towns. See Glossary.

Sabaot schools follow the Kenyan national curriculum, divided into nursery, primary (standards one to eight), and secondary levels (forms one to four). With Kenya being a multi-lingual society, the Government has standardised the medium of instruction by requiring Swahili to be used in primary and early secondary education, and English for higher education. This means that many Kenyans have limited ability in reading and writing their mother tongue, particularly if it uses different phonetic sounds and orthography to that of Swahili.

It is also acceptable to the Kenyan Government that mother tongue be taught in primary levels from one to three, but in many areas this is not adopted owing to lack of materials, a shortage of trained mother tongue teachers, and classes of mixed ethnicity. It is left to those outside the State education system to devise materials and fund additional teacher training.

This problem is now being addressed amongst the Sabaot with the support of the Mount Elgon District Education Office. A pilot scheme exists for the production of Sabaot school materials, including mother tongue reading and writing skills for pre-schools (nursery level) and a teacher-training programme to aid implementation.³³ This is targeted at primary schools in Mount Elgon and Trans Nzoia Districts where Sabaot children predominate, whereas in Bungoma District, the greater mix of languages owing to the proximity of towns means Swahili is preferred.

It is difficult to give definitive figures for literacy in the Sabaot language, as there is still no agreed measurement or even definition of what constitutes a 'literate' person. The United Nations have tried since the mid-1940s to standardise the evaluation of literacy world-wide, but this has proved difficult to implement. Accusations that literacy levels are 'adjusted' to gain advantage when seeking development loans (Slack, 2000:2) mean that some countries may raise or lower their literacy figures accordingly. In Sabaot terms, a literate person is one who can read medicine instructions and land-purchase contracts, and write letters. Literacy amongst the Sabaot was evaluated in the 1986 by BTL consultant linguist Iver Larsen as 70% of adults literate in Swahili and 1% in the mother tongue.³⁴ Of the

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³³ Devised by SBTL.

³⁴ This is still the figure given in the *Ethnologue* (Grimes, 2000).

illiterates, about 20% were men and 80% women. By 2001 approximately 41,000 Sabaot had received mother tongue literacy training, raising the figure to 27%.³⁵

In the song workshops used later in this research, several literacy learning levels were apparent. Those participants with minimal or no schooling found the process of defining characteristics and structure of their traditional songs unfamiliar, although their skills of memorisation and imitation were well-honed. Their thinking processes were concrete and relational rather than analytical-abstract, and as primary oral communicators, they dealt with information in easily remembered formats such as stories, songs, poetry and proverbs. They also had high dependency on the community for information, in keeping with the relational aspect of oral cultures.³⁶

The next two levels applied to the majority of attendees at the song workshops, the first being residual oral communicators or functional illiterates. These had learnt some reading and writing through a period of schooling, but remained with a preference for oral methods. The second were semi-literates, whose expositional and literate skills were still in the formative stages.

Missing were the secondary oral communicators, or those obtaining the majority of their information from electronic media. Today in many developing countries, there are signs that people are moving from primary to secondary orality by skipping the literate phase and switching directly into electronic media. This, however, has yet to make any impact on Mount Elgon.

The range of Sabaot vernacular literature has now increased to include community health leaflets, teaching materials, agricultural advice, traditional story-books and the New Testament. These provide considerable motivation for people to be able to read Sabaot, and there are requests by schools and community groups for more materials to be made available. Although official posters remain in Swahili, some medical clinics now translate their information into Sabaot. On a wider scale, the spread of such materials is hindered with relatively few outlets available for selling books on the mountain, and apart from the SBTL centre at Kobsiuro, people are required to travel to Kapsokwony, Cheptais or Kimilili to find a modest bookshop.

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³⁵ Updates provided by Agatha van Ginkel, SBTL, June 2001.

³⁶ Relational here implies verbal networking on a broad scale. Full definitions of these levels can be found in Ong, 1982.



With the promotion of literacy, people are now recognising the benefits, particularly in trading and land matters, as they no longer have to trust others for such information. Yet despite the incentives to become literate, poorer families still keep some of their children (particularly daughters) back from schooling in order to look after animals or work in the fields. This is reflected in statistics: in 1996 it was estimated that only 70% of children enrolled at primary school.³⁷ Many of those who did attend dropped out after reaching Standard 3 or 4, and the percentage of those progressing to secondary level was as low as 30%, chiefly due to parents' inability to pay school fees. In families where several children finish primary school and a decision has to be made concerning who continues, it is not the first-born but the one with the highest marks who is usually chosen.

After secondary schooling, there is a noticeable drift from rural to urban areas, particularly as people realise education does not always bring an income on the mountain. Only the smallest minority continue education into tertiary levels, mostly by means of sponsorship from church or mission organisations, but the numbers of these returning to leadership positions amongst the Sabaot are encouraging. Community respect for such people means that decision-making is now no longer the prerogative of older men and is extending into younger levels of society.

In recent years, attitudes amongst the Sabaot towards education have undergone a marked change. Many of those in the over forties bracket who missed the opportunity to attend school (particularly women) are now joining functional adult literacy programmes and non-formal education opportunities.³⁸

## **2.9 Sabaot social and political structures**

The Sabaot social structure is based on patrilineal lineage or descent, with decision-making and privileged status vested in the male elders. It is not the place of a young

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³⁷ Figures supplied by the District Education Officer in Kapsokwony.

³⁸ In addition to producing school materials, SBTL began a pilot mother tongue adult literacy programme in 1998, training school teachers to run these classes on a voluntary basis. Their material production ranges from reading primers to transitional literacy components (Swahili to Sabaot) which help people to recognise the differences and similarities between the two languages. SBTL also started a mother tongue Sunday school teaching programme for children up to 14 years, and in 1999, it was estimated that 1500 to 2000 children were involved in this.



man to correct an elder, although official authority channels can now bypass this. Women are affiliated with their husband's patrilineage, gaining rights and obligations with respect to their husbands' position. However, as a counterbalance to patrilineality, women retain higher status as sisters to their natal lineage side than they do as wives under their husbands' lineage. A widow can never remarry, and if no direct heir exists, she retains her husbands' property during her own lifetime (Snell, 1954:28). The responsibility for maintaining her and any children falls either to the youngest adult son, to the husband's clan, or to the husband's nearest junior brother.

The only prominent public office open to a woman has traditionally been that of female circumcisor, and community leadership for the Sabaot remains male orientated. Following colonisation, the national political structure has given women opportunities to voice opinions and vote, and today there is no reason why a Sabaot woman cannot be appointed to a political or administrative office. There are now women elders, women teachers in local schools, and the adult literacy teaching programme includes many women tutors.

### 2.9.1 Traditional social structure

The traditional social operating structure amongst the Sabaot is a complex tier system, with the primary determinants being historical dialect use and clan membership. On the following chart, those groups that have ceased to function due to intermixing or political changes are enclosed in brackets:

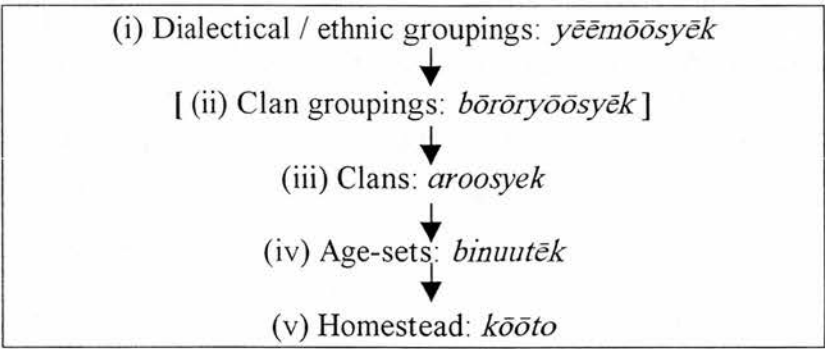


Chart 2h: The traditional social structure of the Sabaot

(i) Dialectal / ethnic groupings: *yēmēmēt* (sing.), *yēmōōsyēk* (pl.)

The dialect a person uses gives valuable clues as to family history, and provides a strong social bond amongst the Sabaot. *Yēmōōsyēk* previously referred to specific dialectal cluster areas within the region dating from the earliest migrations into the Mount Elgon area. With intermarriage, these groupings have become increasingly mixed and the term now refers to the overall ethnic grouping of Sabaot (*yēmēmēt*).

Although members of dialect clusters traditionally co-operated together and often met to discuss social issues, the wide geographical scattering of members now means that the *kōkwēēt* or council of village elders has become the more common decision-maker. Members of this are sometimes nicknamed 'BK's' or *Booyikaab Kōkwēēt* (*Boontēētaab Kōkwēēt*, sing.), their purpose being to regulate daily affairs and maintain unity. They are locally elected, and may represent several *aroosyek* (clans), *binuutēk* (age-sets) and *kōōto* (families). Manners (1967:207-359) preferred to call them 'regiments' or phratries rather than *kōkwēēt*, as they originally convened to deal with matters such as serious crime (now handled by Government offices) and inheritance disputes. Today, if a decision cannot be reached, the matter is referred to an outside judge, and in either case, the final decision is binding and solemnised by slaughtering an animal.

(ii) Clan groupings: *bōrōryēēt* (sing.), *bōrōryōōsyēk* (pl.)

In the same vicinity as a *yēmēmēt* there were usually several clans represented, and traditionally these combined into larger clusters known as *bōrōryōōsyēk*. Security against raids was the main motivation, with the concept of mutual defence groups deriving from the Sabaot word '*booryēēt*', meaning 'battle'. *Bōrōryōōsyēk* functioned as small self-governing units or councils in which social, political and economic affairs were regulated, and crimes and other major disputes were arbitrated. Disciplinary matters such as theft or insubordination were generally settled within each *bōrōryēēt* by members of whichever *binta* (age-set) was involved.

Weatherby (1966:94) described *bōrōryōōsyēk* as territorial units, with clan members tending to remain within the area of their own *bōrōryēēt*, corporately owning land in order to cultivate millet on a small scale. If a man wished to transfer

to another *bōrōryēēt*, he was free to do so and would take his wives with him. A chairman for each *bōrōryēēt* was democratically elected,³⁹ but this position was later replaced by a system of chiefs as introduced by the colonial Government.

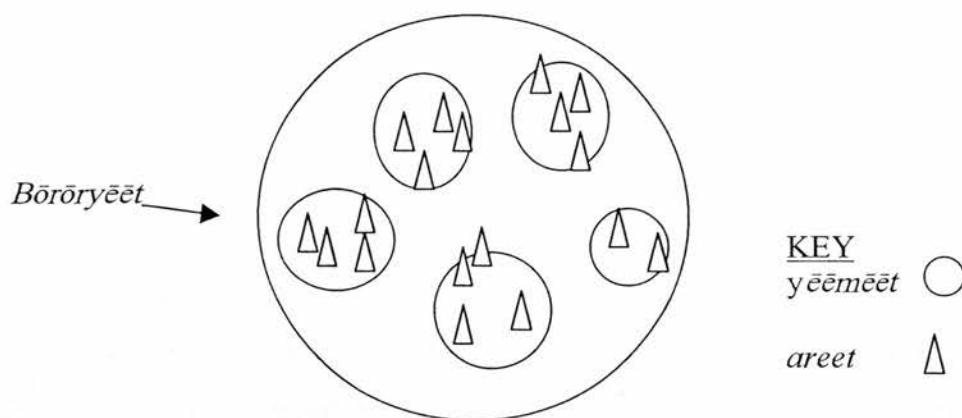


Plate 2i: Typical layout within a *bōrōryēēt*

(iii) Clans: *areet* (sing.), *aroosyek* (pl.)

The clan system amongst the Sabaot still provides a unifying bond across physical boundaries and dialects, overseeing rules of exogamy, inheritance and ownership of children and property. When an important ceremony or ritual is due to be held, all members of the particular clan are informed, regardless of how dispersed they have become. If a Sebei should choose to move from Uganda into Kenya, he may intermarry and be 'swallowed' into another clan, but he does not lose the link with his original clan.

Although unequal in size, clans are equal in status. The head or Chairman of each clan is usually an elder of suitable temperament, registered with the Government and having a supporting committee. Certain clans specialise in particular roles such as blacksmiths or *wōōrkooyik* (prophets), although these traits are more dilute today. Each clan also has a symbol or totem, usually a particular animal or bird which it is considered a sin to kill. For example, when a member of the clan with the vulture symbol died, the body was left in the forest for the bird to fly down and "cover with its wings" (to eat it).

³⁹ This is the male viewpoint, as women were excluded.

Clans are patrilineal and exogamous, with members only able to marry outside of their own group. Two 'vultures', for example, cannot marry one another, this being the deliberate means by which clans ensure a wider network of interrelationships and unity. Seniority and social prestige are important, although the determinants for this are changing. As recently as one generation ago, a large family with many wives was considered an indication of wealth due to lucrative brideprice opportunities for girl children. Nowadays it is the holders of education, leadership ability and land wealth who have greater influence, and polygamy is on a sharp decline due to the church's advocacy of monogamy.

Older clan members still perceive the clan as being a powerful unifying force in this age, whereas younger members have increasingly negative views of the entire concept. Much of this results from the unsettled nature of tribal attitudes throughout Kenya, and to a greater sense of independence in which families usurp the clan in decision-making processes. It is still considered a point of pride for the Sabaot people to instil in their children a knowledge of the clan system through memorising ancestral lineage, but the practical reality points to a weakening of historical knowledge amongst many of the younger generation. Government institutions now replace most of the clan's functions, but interest revives during times of charismatic leadership, political activities, conflict or when someone is gravely ill.

(iv) Age-sets: *binuutēk* (pl.), *binta* (sing.)

The Sabaot, similar to all Kalenjin and also the Maasai, have a mechanism of recycling age-sets called *binuutēk* (pl.) or *ipinda* (Kalenjin). These ensure social organisation, and membership begins when rites of passage to adulthood and marital status have been completed. A circumcised man can only marry the daughter of a man of the age-set above or below him, and never the daughter of a man of his own age-set. Boys and girls are admitted to the age-set that corresponds to the year in which they are circumcised, which allows for considerable age variation. It also means that the members of one age-set must be accorded respect by members of more junior age-sets, regardless of biological age.

There is much confusion today as to the historical dates of each age-set, owing partly to the lack of written records, and partly because circumcision is held at different times depending on the geographical area. Amongst the *Mosoob* and *Koony*

dialects, circumcision can be held every year, either in April or December, with each age-set comprising a block of eight years, having an established name, and rotating in regular order through an eight-set cycle. This means that ideally it would take sixty-four years to complete the cycle. However, the period of eight years has not always been in force, and Ehret (1971:36) describes a Kalenjin system in which each age-set lasts approximately fifteen years. The speakers of the *Book* dialect have a system that changes every ten years and their order of age-set names differs from those in the chart below, hence they have not been included in this instance.

Few of those questioned on genealogies could recall more than four or five previous generations, and many were uncertain of age-set names and dates.⁴⁰ Gourlay (1999:104)) discovered amongst the nearby Karimojong a similar inability to trace ancestry back through numerous generations, and concluded they too were conditioned by the idea of 'cyclical' progression rather the 'linear' genealogy. A further confusion for the Sabaot today is that many of the age-sets have alternative names, these being synonyms for some important historical or social event that occurred around the same time. For now the following chart must suffice.⁴¹

*Table 2j: Sabaot age-set Groups*

<u>Name of age-set</u> (synonym given in brackets)	<u>Suggested years</u> ⁴²	<u>Notes</u>	<u>Examples</u>
1. <i>Nyoonki</i> ( <i>Cheebkuy</i> )	(1876-1891)		
2. <i>Maina</i> ( <i>Samaynēn</i> )	(1892-1907)	Nandi raids, spread of cattle disease	
3. <i>Chumo</i> ( <i>Ntatwa</i> )	(1908-1923)	First World War.	Ndiwa Chebet
4. <i>Soowē</i> ( <i>Muchuunku</i> )	1922-1932 (1924-1932)	Second World War, Carter Land Commission in Trans-Nzoia	Mang'esoy's father (died in 1969)

⁴⁰ Goldschmidt encountered similar problems amongst the Sebei (1976:88).

⁴¹ From *Kibkoymēt* downwards is also agreed by Snell, 1954:13.

⁴² Dates in brackets are provided by Godfrey Kipsisey, who is currently researching age-sets amongst the Sabaot.



5. <i>Kōrōōnkōro</i> (those from this age-set are also nicknamed <i>Kabsurawali</i> , or 'the first to wear short trousers')	1933-1940 (1933-1942)	Starting date of this cycle (1933) given by Kororio. First school opened on Mount Elgon	Kororio, Japheth Chemiat, Enow Kiberenge, Gerishom Mowo
6. <i>Kibkoymēt</i>	1942-1949 (1943-1952)		Jairo Kamoyet, Jacob N. Ng'eywo
7. <i>Kaableelach</i> ( <i>Riimirim</i> )	1950-1957 (1952-1959)	Few were circumcised in these years owing to a locust plague	Masai (1954), Joash K. Kamwanja
8. <i>Kibnyiikeew</i> (verb 'keew' means field, because there were so many candidates in these years they 'filled a field', the ceremonial backlog from locust years)	1958-1965 (1960-1967)	Circumcisions in this age-set did not begin until 1960, although the cycle started two years earlier. Army worm invasion in crops	
<u>Cycle restarts:</u>			
1. <i>Nyoonki</i> ( <i>Cheebkuy</i> )	1966-1973 (1968-1979)		Mang'esoy (circumcised in 1972 aged 19)
2. <i>Maina</i> ( <i>Samaynēn</i> )	1974-1984 (1980-1990)		
3. <i>Chumo</i> ( <i>Ntatwa</i> )	1985-1992 (1991-2000)		Stanley Ndiema (circumcised in 1985)
4. <i>Soowē</i> ( <i>Muchuunku</i> )	1993-2000		

Further variation is exemplified amongst some of the lowland Sabaot, where circumcision could only take place every alternate year in a block of eight years. At some point this became more flexible and today the alternate years rule is not necessarily followed. When an age-set moves to the next in the cycle, there is a change-over ceremony which marks the shift in power status from the most recent 'junior age-set' to a 'warrior grade' level. The next level is the 'junior elder age-set', and the sequence continues through subsequent levels of seniority until all members of the group have died.



When an age-set undergoes initiation, the bond is one of filial relationship, and those who are circumcised in the same ceremony regard each other as brothers/sisters or age-mates from that point onwards. It is a formal way of strengthening internal social responsibilities and provides a serious point of reference for male community members. In the case of women, their age-set is neutralised by marriage to a man from another age-set as patrilineality overrules. A separate 'brotherhood' ceremony may subsequently be held between two members of an age-set bond group in which *tomookyeet* finger rings made from the skin of a sacrificed bull are exchanged. These are later sewn onto a highly decorated gourd to be kept in a secret place.

Members of age-sets often refer to one another as *sirito*, implying 'my friend or colleague'. However, on more formal occasions members of age-sets revert from being egalitarian to being ranked according to levels of seniority. The first to be circumcised are known as *nkoburēēk* (*nkobu* means 'Uncle'; a dialectical variant is *ngābirēēk*), those in the mid bracket as *āybēēriik* (meaning 'young men'), and the last to be circumcised nicknamed *Kab bēēl bany* (meaning 'the ones who roast meat for others'). The latter must always accord privileges to the older in their age-set. Someone who is circumcised in the last year of an age-set can cross to the up-coming age-set if they wish to be a senior in that group, but they must first provide an ox for their intended age-sets members to eat. Women acquire seniority from the age-sets of their husbands.

(v) Homestead: *kōōto*

The *kōōto* or family area is the basic economic unit, the cultivation of which is a family responsibility. Homesteads will often combine to make larger co-operative units in which many communal and reciprocal activities occur, and these help to strengthen relationships and provide assistance in times of hardship. In the evenings it was once commonplace for older men of a *kōōto* to gather together for discussions. Younger men used to remain in the background, but now they gather to discuss ideas of their own from the developing world, a sign of the societal changes that portend.

Although the *bōrōryōōsyēk* no longer have a role today, the other four categories listed above continue to be of importance amongst the Sabaot. Alongside

these, the contemporary setting is guided by 'linkages', a term used by Nketia (1991:83) to mean membership in exogenous institutions such as educational groups, churches, market unions, work co-operatives and similar establishments. Such groups are less homogeneous than traditional groupings, but the increasing trend is for people to participate in both settings.

The Sabaot also use intermediaries when seeking advice on various social matters. In pre-colonial times, prophets or *Wōōrkooyik* (*Wōōrkooyoontēēt* sing.) were frequently consulted by young and old for blessing, counsel in resolving community matters, or in times of adversity such as drought or war. The equivalent to the Maasai *iloibonok*, they were also known as 'people with heads', empowered by the supernatural. If any of their pronouncements were not followed, it was believed death or disease would result.⁴³ As members of special priestly clans, their powers were inherited from father to son and no *Wōōrkooyoontēēt* could rule another.

They were also responsible for conducting sacrifices on high-level occasions, and were repaid with harvest portions. Their influence was such that prior to independence, the British invited all *Wōōrkooyik* to participate in meetings along with the newly appointed Chiefs. However, as political frustrations increased, the power struggles became too difficult to contain, and the colonial Government then sought ways of forcibly moving many *Wōōrkooyik* some distance away to the South Nyanza area. Today their numbers are few, but they are still occasionally consulted.

They should not be confused with the Sabaot *bōōniik*, being those practising witchcraft (*bōōniintēēt*, sing.), nor with a closely related group of diviners called *chēēbtaalamiisyek* (*chēēbsookēyoontēēt*, sing.).

## 2.9.2 Social issues

The majority of current social issues revolve around the felt needs of the Sabaot people. An outsider's perspective might assume that general poverty is the greatest problem, but rural Sabaot have learned to make the best of their situation, long coping without basic amenities of electricity and accessible water.

The main topics of discussion in the small group meetings reveal that desires for modernity are stirring, and there is growing awareness of developments

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⁴³ As recounted in the *Mānyirōōr* song, chapter 4.4.3.1.

dependent on government or outside sponsorship. A perennial concern often voiced is the lack of roads and transport for the marketing of goods. Oxen and donkeys are expensive to buy, the climate is sometimes unpredictable, and many farmers operate at a loss.

Land problems remain divisive, particularly the shortage of suitable plots and the cost of purchase. After the Government land shifts, some people were reluctant to settle with any permanence for fear that they would be required to move again. Such uncertainties have done little to stem an increase in alcoholism, which has now spread beyond seasonal ceremonial occasions such as circumcision to pervade everyday life. Theft, social unrest and jealousy are all increasing.

Another important need is for increased public health services. Clinics and hospitals are few, and many deaths occur from illnesses such as highland malaria, typhoid, TB, pneumonia and measles. HIV-AIDS and prostitution are also appearing. There are dietary problems needing community education. Women now recognise that the survival rate for their children is improving, but despite this and a decrease in polygamy, families remain large.

### **2.9.3 Political administration**

The political structure in the Mount Elgon region (Western Province) was begun in the early 1900s under colonial administration, and at the time of writing this, the Government of Kenya is headed by President Daniel arap Toroitich Moi, a Kalenjin of the Tugen tribe.

As with every Province in Kenya, Western is represented in the House of Parliament by a democratically elected Member of Parliament. On the administrative side there exists a system of Councillors under the Local Government, and the highest administrative official at Provincial level is the Provincial Commissioner (PC), who reports directly to the President. The PC for Western Province, is currently located in Kakamega, and below him are the District Commissioner (DC) and the respective District Officers (DO's). Reporting to the DO's are Chiefs of Locations, who handle local issues such as land disputes. If a matter proves too complex to be resolved at this level, it is referred to the DO.

## 2.10 Traditional beliefs and the influence of the Church in the Sabaot region

The metaphysical beliefs of the Sebei are dealt with in some detail by Goldschmidt (1976:302-341), and as the majority of their perceptions are shared by the Sabaot, I will not repeat material already published. However, certain aspects of religion need mention as they shed light on the occasions and subject material of songs.

The Sabaot, as with other Kalenjin tribes, have always believed in the existence of an all-powerful monotheistic god who is the source of power and blessings. This high god has been given several names, each reflecting a particular quality. *Asiista*, 'the sun', is often shortened to *Asiis*, the one who appears faithfully to his people every morning from the distant heavens and leaves them at night. Some believe he hides in caves on the mountain, although the Sabaot do not revere Mount Elgon as the sacred house of god as do the Kikuyu of Mount Kenya.

*Asiis* traditionally blesses his people by providing fresh milk through the cows, a reason for this liquid now being used in many ceremonies by the Sabaot. It is sprinkled on the ground inside the house where a family is to sleep; a person will throw it onto a cooking fire whilst saying to the ancestors "don't follow us"; and for additional blessing it is sprinkled outside the entrance of a person's house by an elder facing east.

*Asiis* is also believed to be responsive to rites of intercession for rain, crops, long life and bearing children, but although the Nandi are documented as having had a special song reserved for such intercessions,⁴⁴ I have discovered no evidence of a similar song amongst the Sabaot. The activity of *Asiis* is considered beneficent and life-sustaining, yet he can show displeasure and judgement through calamities such as drought or illness. At such times the elders will gather together and seek appeasement through prayers.

In an act of worship, older people will still spit towards the east, known as *Koong'asiis* ('the eye of the sun'), when they emerge from their houses in the early morning. They also utter a prayer using the name *Chēēbto* (God in female form), saying:

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⁴⁴ Snell, 1954:5.

*Chēēbtaab koong'asiis*  
 Daughter of the East  
*lyisēēnēēch keeyaanikaab kaalyeet,*  
 sprinkle us with white milk as a sign of peace,  
*ikōōnēēch ra kiyēē kiikēnēē keey ānkiiriibēēch,*  
 give us hope and help us this day,  
*isoobēēch,*  
 give us healing,  
*ankiikōōnēēch biirtaayeet.*  
 give us victory.

God as a woman also brings victory for men in a battle, hence the Sabaot believe women in general to be peacemakers, sustainers, givers of life, and the source of good luck. Women and girls are seldom killed by raiding parties.

The imagery of the sun is significant as the Sabaot recognise the absence of light as a time associated with evils such as witchcraft, theft and thuggery. Ironically, those who practise witchcraft, sorcery or magic believe that they are empowered by the same sun, although demons can also give strength. Another name occasionally used for God is *Cheebtaaleel*, based on the verb *taal* meaning 'to reflect brightness' and *che-*, the humanizer of the noun.

The name chosen by the Christian church and used today in the Sabaot Bible is *Yēyiintēēt*, meaning 'God the Creator' (from the verb *yey*, 'to create'). This is commonly abbreviated to *Yēyiin*, and portrays one who is interactive with his people and responds to direct prayer. Older non-churched Sabaot still refer to *Asiis*, but belief in the divine God is now a core value for many Sabaot. Success in life requires religion to be at the centre, an example being that if fertilisers have been used and the harvest is good, people will not attribute this to better land treatment but will say it is due to God being happy.

Another core value that is now in direct conflict with the church is the belief in spirits of clan ancestors (*āyiikaab kōōng'woong*). Although these spirits can be good or bad in nature, they are inwardly feared by many. They are never openly worshipped, there are no shrines or ritual loci, and there is no ancestor cult.⁴⁵ On a cultural relevancy scale, the combination of a heavenly being and ancestral spirits remain enmeshed in nearly every traditional ceremony and walk of life, regardless of

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⁴⁵ Similarly amongst the Sebei (Goldschmidt, 1976:340).



the growth in local Christian churches. Spirits are even seen by some as the medium through which people can pray to God, a scenario which is familiar in the West today. Although Sabaot Christians will outwardly accuse the devil of causing hardship, underneath there is still a dichotomy for many with deep-seated ancestor veneration, and such beliefs are likely to run alongside one another for many years.

Ancestral spirits live below the ground and are both the source and the solution to problems that a person encounters in life. The nature of a spirit depends on the lives and circumstances of those still living, and the belief is that if people fail to follow Sabaot ways or allow in-fighting between clans, there is a strong likelihood that the spirits will bring calamities. Hence they need to be appeased at all costs. Malevolent spirits use the darkness to visit family homes, searching for suitable victims. With the return of light, problems give way to the power of the sun, one reason why the Sabaot preferred to fight their wars during daytime rather than under cover of darkness. When someone is believed to be possessed, ceremonial animal sacrifices, exorcism and casting of the offending spirit into a fire is conducted by a *Chēēbsookēyoontēēt*. Songs are never sung during rituals of this nature.

There is considerable variation in the type of animal required for sacrifices, particularly as to whether a sheep or a goat is used, but in cases considered of great gravity, a bull is selected. The *Mosoobiisyēk* believe that other animals such as the leopard (*mēēlilto*), elephant (*bēēlyoontēēt*) and vulture (*motoonyta*) have spirits. Parts of such animals are often worn as charms around the neck, waist or at the hem of clothing to protect against evil, disease and 'people with bad eyes' (those with intent to harm). Natural phenomena are considered related to the spirit world, and thunder is feared as the bringer of destruction, often invoked in curses. There is also a common saying used by those in dispute: "If I did it, let lightning strike me". If a person is passing through an area where he or she is not known, the occurrence of lightning may cause people to believe that person is a witch or a murderer.

The coming of Christianity to Mount Elgon brought many non-indigenous church leaders from nearby areas. Relationships became strained owing to land disputes, and after the tribal land clashes in 1992, many of these church leaders were superseded by local Sabaot evangelists, some with little or no pastoral training. Another less fortunate result of evangelistic thrusts in Africa has been an indirect



ideological desire to 'civilise', which in turn has left churches entangled over issues such as cultural expression and worship. The appropriateness of indigenous styles, instruments and body movements have been challenged both from the social/moral viewpoint and the theological, and substitutes have been put into place with little thought as to how they might impact or alienate existing cultural forms.

One of the more obvious examples amongst the Sabaot affects their traditional instrument known as the *bukantiit*, considered too 'sinful' to be used in church settings owing to its association with popular beer parties. The consequence today is that cultural issues are perceived as divisive topics from the church viewpoint, and most church leaders choose to encourage song styles already well entrenched in urban church environments elsewhere in Kenya.

Unlike much of East Africa, Mount Elgon shows no Islamic influences as yet although Christianity is fast taking hold with a rapid increase in churches on the mountain. However, appearances can be deceptive, as surveys have indicated that as few as 10% of Sabaot can be considered 'true' Christians, dropping to less than 0.25% amongst the highland *Mosoobiisyēk*. The rest maintain traditional beliefs, "their conversion incomplete".⁴⁶

In Sabaot churches, the majority of attendees are women and children. A number of elders were baptised during the evangelistic thrusts of the 1980s and given Christian names, but have now drifted away from active church membership, returning to traditional ways.⁴⁷

Funeral rites now epitomise the conflict between church and tradition. The church insists on using coffins and placing the body on its back, but many elders prefer the custom of carving out a small hollow in one of the side-walls of the grave and placing the body on its side. Other issues are the use of hymns during burial ceremonies, during which many elders remain silent, and the teaching of the church that all men are equal when it is the tradition for age-set members to honour one another through the bond of initiation.

As the authority of the Sabaot elders begins to weaken in the face of State education and changing social norms, discipline and societal morals no longer have

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⁴⁶ Comment of a Sabaot Christian elder, Paul Sundu Kibit, at the Kapsokwony Pastors Convention, December 1998.

⁴⁷ Patrick Ndege Ndiwa, Kapsokwony workshop, August 1999.

the same constraints, and one of the saddest symptoms amongst the Sabaot is the increase in drunkenness at celebrations. The churches are offering alternatives, but the understanding of such teaching is often superficial and makes little impact on the deeper issues of Sabaot life. In the midst of these upheavals, the rehearsals of church choirs and youth groups will last for hours, sometimes an entire night; as much a respite and refuge from the changing scene around them as it is for elders to gather in a homestead to sing songs accompanied by the *bukantiit*.



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## CHAPTER 3: SABAOT TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS

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*Ibāybooyē biich :bukantiit.*  
The *bukantiit* soothes the heart.

Sabaot saying

### 3.1 Sabaot traditional instruments

There are a number of musical instruments that contribute to the cultural history of the Sabaot. The predominant one is the *bukantiit* lyre (*bukantiinek* pl.), a class of instrument that is common to many other Nilotic language groups but with considerable variances in shape, number of strings and tuning. This geographical spread has tempted some generalised documentation, but there is little written that is specific to the historical development, construction, musical uses, performance styles and cultural aspects of the *bukantiit*. The following observations will hopefully go some way to correct this, and also introduce other instruments of which I have found evidence amongst the Sabaot.

### 3.2 The *bukantiit*

Many discrepancies exist in the spelling of '*bukantiit*' within articles on Kenyan music. This is partly due to Sabaot orthography revisions such as the change *p* to *b*, and also to the speakers of other African languages intermixing phonological features from one language to another.¹ The custom of abbreviating names (for example, Kiplang'at is often pronounced as simply Plang'at), means that *kipukantit* became *pkandit*, and then eventually *bugandet* and *bukantiit*. The Pokot people shorten this even further to *pkan* or *pukan*.

#### 3.2.1 History of the *bukantiit*

The earliest known examples of the bowl lyre family, to which the *bukantiit* belongs, date to the 3rd millennium BC. from sites in Mesopotamia (Wachsmann and Anderson 1984:579). A banquet scene painted on a mosaic tile from Ur, dated c.2600 BC., shows a lyre with parallel strings and decorated resonator, so it can be assumed the instrument began its life sometime prior to this. From Mesopotamia, lyres

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¹ These and other important language characteristics are discussed further in chapter seven.

subsequently spread in several directions. They were the chief instruments in ancient Greece, depicted in a fresco of Orpheus dated 250-400 AD. found in Rome's catacomb of Petrus and Marcellinus, and were known throughout medieval Europe.²

A Greek myth credits the invention of the lyre to Hermes, who, when he found a dead tortoise on the banks of the river Nile, plucked its dried sinews. He is then supposed to have added arms and a crossbar to the shell and used cow tendon for further strings. Of those Sabaot I talked with on Mount Elgon, most could only conjecture as to the origin of their *bukantiit*, and no-one had ever seen a version with a tortoise-shell resonator.³ Both Kisinja and Chelasia remembered their grandfathers telling how the *bukantiit* accompanied the great southern migration from Egypt to Sudan and Ethiopia,⁴ but according to Mang'esoy, the history of the *bukantiit* goes back only as far as the 1930s when he believes it was adapted from another Kalenjin version. Prior to this he says the Sabaot were similar to the Maasai in having no instruments.

There is demographic and linguistic evidence⁵ that the migration from North Africa continued through Uganda and Congo to the north-western regions of Lake Victoria, close to the foot of Mount Elgon and a doorway into Kenya. This may be one reason why there is such a concentration of lyres in the eastern Africa area, in contrast with instruments such as zithers, lutes and harps which are spread more widely across the African continent.

Attempts to date instruments are fraught with problems, as those made from vegetable or animal materials seldom survive long enough to become archaeological deposits. Projections as to the arrival of the lyre in Kenya are variable, with Sachs's (1940) theories of instrumental evolution in the world suggesting a Neolithic Stone Age dating. However, this term is vague as it does not have the same chronological significance for Africa, and it also conflicts with the twelve layer classification stratum of Hornbostel that places neighbouring bowl lyres such as the Ethiopian

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² Maas and Snyder, 1989.

³ More will be said on this in section 3.2.3.

⁴ There is no evidence whether this was in fact the *bukantiit* or another form of lyre. In Ethiopia, lyres include the *beganna* and *krar*, whilst in Sudan, the lyre is found amongst the Shilluk, Dinka and Nuer. In Uganda it occurs amongst the Madi, Gishu, Ganda, Sebei and Soga, and is used by at least another five people groups in the north-east section of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ref. Wachsmann and Anderson (1984).

⁵ Merriam, 1967:85-114.



*beganna* in the much later 'Pre Christian, West Asiatic' era (Hornbostel, 1933:299-301). Historians are now largely agreed on 1446 BC. as the date of the Red Sea crossing, but folklore aside, there remains a lack of hard evidence as to the migrational history of the lyre (Merriam, 1967:96-101).

Searches for historical source material such as cave paintings on Mount Elgon have been unproductive, whilst the earliest African pictorial evidence of any stringed instrument appears to be a rock painting discovered in the Sahara by Henri Lhote in 1956.⁶ It suggests a seated person playing an instrument whose neck extends away from the body and has been dated ca. 800-700 BC., although there has been some controversy as the date is based on the organological features of a drawn copy rather than the original painting.⁷ Wachsmann (1964:85) describes this as a "type B African harp of the tanged type",⁸ similar in shape to the harps found in Congo and Uganda, but again there is no certainty that the harp and lyre progressed south of the Sahara together.

It is evident from existing patterns of distribution that instruments in African cultures often occur across ethnically and linguistically related population groups. The *bukantiit*, for example, has relations spread throughout the area of Kalenjin speakers, in keeping with the concept that culture traits tend to be found in geographically or historically induced clusters.⁹ Most of these instrument clusters are located in the eastern half of Kenya, from the Kuria people near the Tanzania border to the Turkana and Samburu in the north. Floyd (1999:175) lists fourteen groups in Kenya using variants of the lyre.

For example, the Nandi instrument is called *ketuba* or *kitubet*.¹⁰ The Kisii version is known as the *obukano*, has eight strings, and owing to its size, is played with the resonator resting on the ground. For this reason it is sometimes referred to by western musicians as the double bass of East Africa. The Luo call their smaller version the *nyatiti*. The Bukusu or Kuria version, known as the *litungu* or *iritungu*, also has eight strings but is distinguished by having longer arms. The Pokot *pkan* is

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⁶ Wachsmann, 1964:85.

⁷ See Kubik, 1994:23 for illustration.

⁸ 'Tanged' means plucked.

⁹ Ref. Gulliver (1952); also the development of *kulturkreis* theories (culture in relation to evolution) in comparative musicology.

¹⁰ See Wahome, 1986:22 for a drawing.

generally smaller than most other lyres, and the Kipsigis use the name of *chepkong* for an instrument similar to the *bukantiit*.¹¹

### 3.2.2 Classification

Under the classification system devised by Erich M. von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs (1914), the *bukantiit* fits the category of class 321.21, bridged bowl lyre of the composite chordophone category. Its strings are stretched between fixed points, and attached to a cross-bar or yoke which lies in the same plane as the sound-table. Two wooden arms and a connecting cross-bar emerge from a sound resonator, and the strings run parallel to the face of the resonator.

'Composite' means that the string bearer and resonator are two separate parts but organically united, and cannot be separated without destroying the instrument. A 'simple' chordophone, in contrast, would consist solely of a string bearer, with or without a non-integral resonator that could be detached without destroying the sound-producing apparatus. *NGDMI* (1984, 2:427) mistakenly ascribes the latter classification to the *kibugandet* instead of the *chepkesem*,¹² describing it as a five-string wishbone frame lyre of the Kipsigis, held against an external resonator such as an empty fuel can. Wahome's description of the *chepkesem* adds that the strings pass from a cross-bar to the slingshot cleft created by the arms, and that the 'resonator' can be a folded dry cowhide.¹³ He attributes the instrument to the Kalenjin, but the Sabaot do not appear to be familiar with it.

A further point of distinction applied by Hornbostel and Sachs to lyres is whether the strings and arms fan out from the resonator towards the cross-bar in a symmetrical or asymmetrical manner, meaning whether the angle between the arms and the cross-bar is 90 degrees or smaller. However, the *bukantiit* today is found with both styles, hence it creates confusion to choose either label as a point of classification.

The resonator itself is an important differentiation between bowl and box lyres. The latter are described by Hornbostel and Sachs (class 321.22) as having a

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¹¹ Senoga-Zake, 1986:136.

¹² An illustration of this can be found in Wahome, 1986:13.

¹³ Another use of this resonator material can be observed amongst the Daasanach who stamp their feet on a dried cowhide to create a percussive effect.

constructed wooden resonator, of which examples are the large eight- to ten-string *beganna* from Sudan and Ethiopia, and the Greek *kithara*, now found in North Africa and the Near East. In contrast, the bowl lyre (class 321.21) is a natural or hollowed-out piece of wood, often curved at the back. This is also known as the East African lyre, and includes the *bukantiit*. As suitable wood is now hard to find on Mount Elgon, so the natural curved shape of the back of the resonator is being replaced by rectangular box construction, which has led to confusion with the box lyre.

The number of strings on an instrument is not a classification feature of Hornbostel and Sachs, but as discussed earlier, can be important in differentiating the *bukantiit* from other lyres. It should also be noted that whereas some larger instruments such as the *obukano* will position the strings closer together to one or other side of the cross-bar, on the *bukantiit* they are equidistant from one another. Another small but important physical feature of the *bukantiit* is a piece of wood that lifts the strings clear of the sound-table. This 'bridge' is moveable should the player wish to make quick adjustments to pitch or sound quality, and more will be said on this in section 3.2.3.

In an earlier discussion relating to changes in instrument classification (chapter 1.4), several alternatives to the Hornbostel Sachs system were mentioned. In considering whether there is need for a different means of classifying the *bukantiit*, I am mindful, for example, that this instrument has a number of parts named after human body parts (see Plate 3e). This might be reason to place the *bukantiit* in the *corpophone* category as devised by Olsen (1980:5) but there is no further body symbolism extended to the instrument in actual use.

Another possible classification, proposed by Reis Flora (1998) is based on materials used in instrument construction. Denyer's (1980) study of the northern Kerio valley *pkan* describes several instruments distinguished principally by the shape and material of the resonator, and the *bukantiit* displays similar variety depending on the maker, the type of materials to hand, and the performer's preferences of the time. However, I feel some unease at using such variants for classification particularly when an instrument is in the process of adaptation. For example, the switch from cloth tuning wraps to metal pegs on the *bukantiit* is a

structural change but there has to be a defining point at which it necessitates reclassification.

In recognising that no system of classification exists as yet to satisfy all the varying criteria, I remain for now with Hornbostel Sachs, but clearly this is not the end of the story. Like Dournon (1992), I feel there is a growing need to refine the lower category divisions and avoid generalities. The broadening of parameters to include a synthesis of cultural and taxonomic features creates huge difficulties in defining standardisation, but construction, sound production and local adaptations are all important. Floyd (1999:177) would prefer such a classification to depend on the perception of those using the instrument rather than the person doing the studying, citing the Turkana and Samburu people's view of their lyres as guitar substitutes. This may well become the case with the Sabaot, although at this point in time they still make a distinction between lyre and guitar.

### 3.2.3 Construction

It is believed the oldest *bukantiit* instruments had resonators made from tortoise carapaces, but the weight of these caused an eventual move towards wood resonators, of which the first may have been adapted from oval eating bowls (Denyer 1980). There is no supporting evidence of carapaces amongst the Sabaot, unlike instruments of the Pokot area where tortoises are common.¹⁴ Denyer also describes instruments with metal resonators amongst the Endo people. A series of illustrations showing the variants in Kalenjin and neighbouring lyres is given in Wahome, 1986:13-24.

The *bukantiinek* (pl.) currently in use on Mount Elgon now fall into two categories. Those which are considered truly traditional are referred to as *bukantiitaab kēny* meaning one 'of great age' or 'of long ago', although the Sabaot word for 'old' (*yoos*) is not used as it implies something that is finished. There appear to be no such qualms when an old woman is nearing the end of her days and is called *cheebyoosyeet*. Today a *bukantiitaab kēny* is more likely to be found in the home of an older player, and can be easily distinguished by the resonator which is made from a log of wood split in half and hollowed out. An average sized diameter of such a log

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¹⁴ There is a photograph of a Pokot lyre with tortoise carapace in Kavyū, 1980:30.

is anywhere from 120 to 250 mm, this becoming the height of the resonator. Softwoods are favoured for ease of carving, and depending on local availability, include *lulyoontēēt*, *bēērēstēēt*, *kureesyēt* (cactus), *siimootwēēt* (fig), and *mukeeng'ereet*.

Pieces of wood averaging some 25 mm in thickness are used to fill the two open sides, cut as semi-circles to accommodate the curve. The open face of the instrument is covered with animal skin, usually the scraped and cured hide of wild goat (*woonokēēt*), Suni antelope (*kēmēsēryēēt*) or cow (*teeta*), and the edges are either laced tightly across the back of the resonator with thongs or nailed to the resonator with wooden pegs.

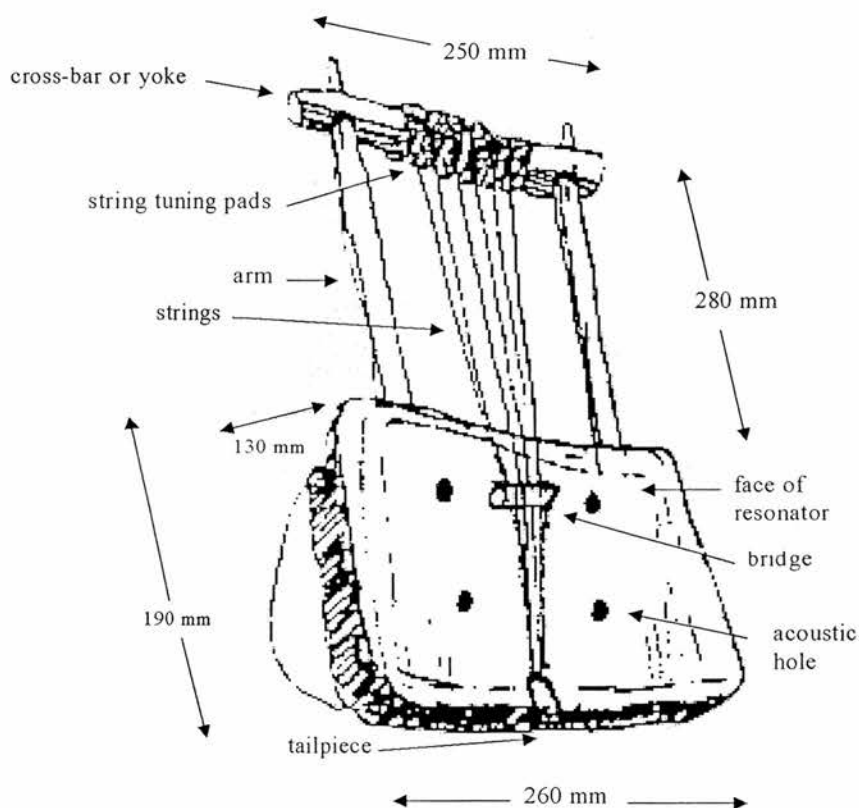


Plate 3a: Dimensions and features of the *bukantiit*

The strings were traditionally tendons taken either from a cow's back (*ineetaab teeta*, meaning 'rope of cow skin'), or else from monkey's tails (*yiinēēt*). This latter name is still used to describe the strings today, although tendons are now replaced by wire on every *bukantiit* I have seen on the mountain. The upper ends of the strings are wrapped in criss-cross manner around strips of cloth known as



*sōrōōmōōk* (pl.) on the cross-bar, and should these begin to slip, a little water or saliva is used to shrink the material.

The two wooden arms of the *bukantiit* enter through holes cut into the top end of the resonator, rather than passing against the side rims as with the northern Kerio lyres. At their furthest end, the arms fit into holes cut into a cross-bar or yoke, sometimes protruding by an inch or more. The cross-bar is made from Elgon teak, a hardwood, whilst the arms are from another hardwood called *orumotit*.

Coinciding with the popularity of guitars in 1930s African dance bands, the construction of the *bukantiit* has undergone several phases of change. The resulting instruments are referred to as *bukantiit nyēē /kookeeweechweech*, meaning 'one that is modified'. It became common practice to fasten the hide face to the resonator with metal nails rather than pegs or thongs, and from the 1970s onwards, to replace hide with wood. The older Sabaot men complain that this adversely affects the sound, but there are a number of practical reasons for such a transition. The increase in arable farming means suitable animals are less easily available, and the perishable hide coverings are tempting to the local rat population. It was not long before makers on Mount Elgon were imitating the construction technique of the guitar, replacing the hollow log resonator of the *bukantiit* with a box frame and flat back.

In 1999 I observed and documented the various stages of construction of a 'modern' *bukantiit* by a local maker in Cheptais, and the completed instrument was ready in less than a week. The process followed a sequence adopted by many makers today, the first step being the construction of a rectangular wood frame using glue and nails. Holes were then drilled for the arms and cross-bar to be attached, and the resonator box was completed by gluing and then nailing four pieces of thin plywood obtained from a local saw mill to the wood frame (ref. Plate 3b).

The cross-bar was flat rather than round, and had six holes drilled in it for the insertion of tuning pegs. These were three-inch nails with one end protruding behind the cross-bar and bent into an L-shape, a concept that is similar to the tuning pegs of a guitar but without the cog ratchet. The speed with which this tuning mechanism has been adopted by nearly every Sabaot player is not surprising as cloth tuning wraps have always been considered difficult to use. However, there are earlier precedents



than the guitar, as some lyre instruments from Mesopotamian excavations show signs of adding a lever system to the cross-bar.

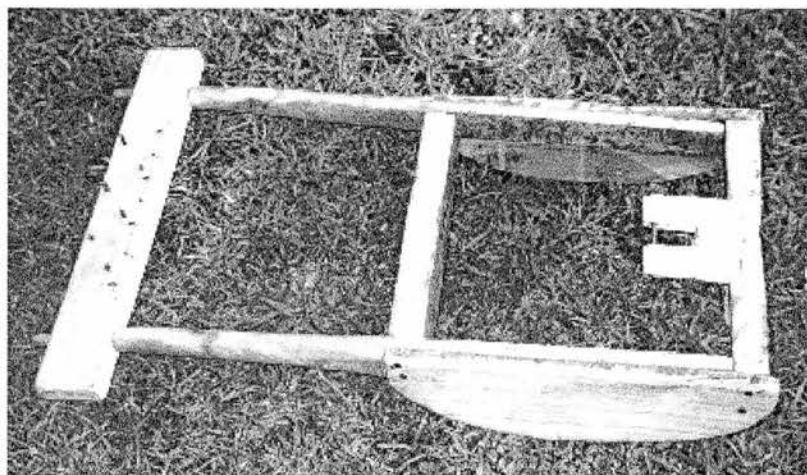


Plate 3b: Recent frame construction of a *bukantiit*

The change to wire strings is a practicality recognised by most Sabaot players for their clearer sound and increased durability. The gauge of wire is the same for all six strings (approximately 12 mm), but as yet I have not seen commercial guitar strings being used on the *bukantiit*. This is probably due to cost and availability problems. Denyer (1980:5) records the earliest use of wire strings on Kerio lyres as during the time of construction on the railways in the 1920s and 30s, which again matches the growing use of the guitar in the Kenyan musical scene.

The increased tension of wire strings has necessitated a further adaptation. Formerly, the means of fastening the strings to the lower end of the instrument was by passing them through a single hole at the edge of the resonator and then out through the rim of the body where they were anchored by a stick or nail. Wire strings now increase the pressure on the edge of the resonator to such an extent that the lower rim often buckles. To combat this, an external metal tailpiece is now used to spread the pressure more evenly over the end of the instrument.

For acoustic purposes one or more holes are cut into the sound-table near to the bridge, but opinions are mixed amongst players as to whether there is a required number of these. In more recent instruments, the arms and cross-bar may be decorated with notches, scorch marks, paint or brass tacks (ref. Plate 3c-d) but this is rare on older *bukantiinek*.

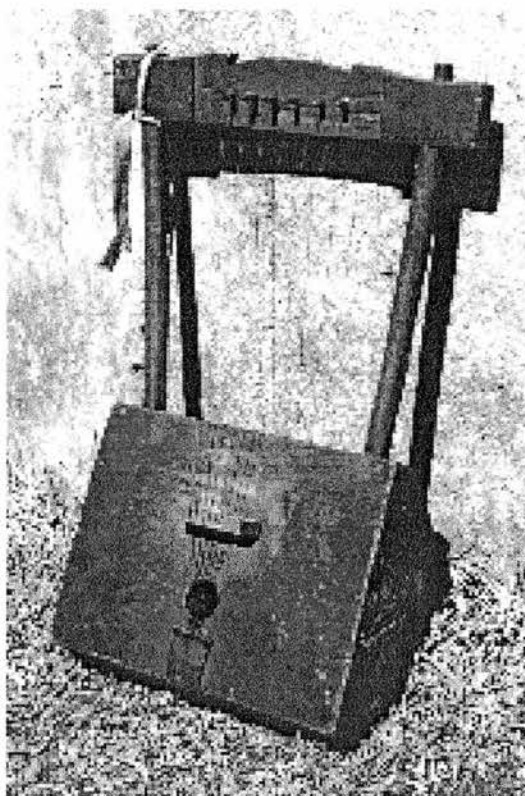


Plate 3c: A recent instrument with plywood resonator, steel strings and tuning mechanism

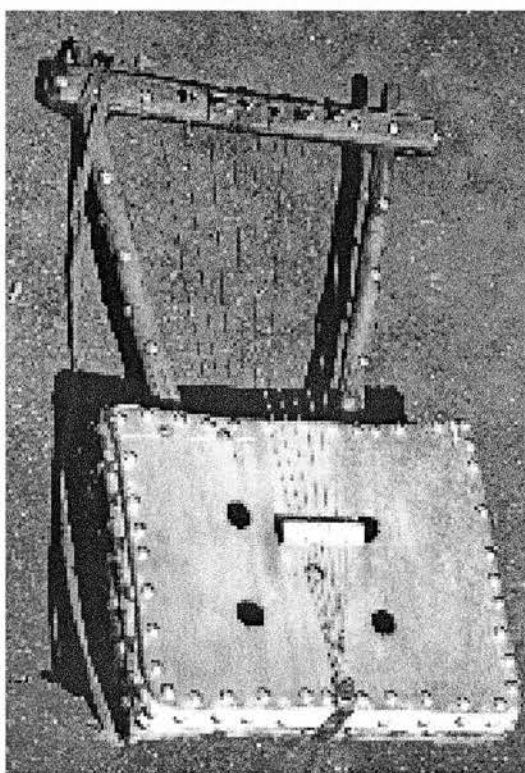


Plate 3d: Ornamented *bukantiit*

Some parts of the *bukantiit* have names corresponding to the human body, although this does not apply to individual strings.¹⁵ Instead, when a player is teaching another to learn, the strings are referred to by their numerical names. Going from right to left, highest pitch to lowest when the instrument faces the performer, these are:

<i>yiinēētaab taay</i>	('tendon-of-first')
<i>yiinēētaab āyēēng'</i>	('tendon-of-second')
<i>yiinēētaab sōmōk</i>	('tendon-of-third')
<i>yiinēētaab ang'wan</i>	('tendon-of-fourth')
<i>yiinēētaab muut</i>	('tendon-of-fifth')
<i>yiinēētaab lo</i>	('tendon-of-sixth')

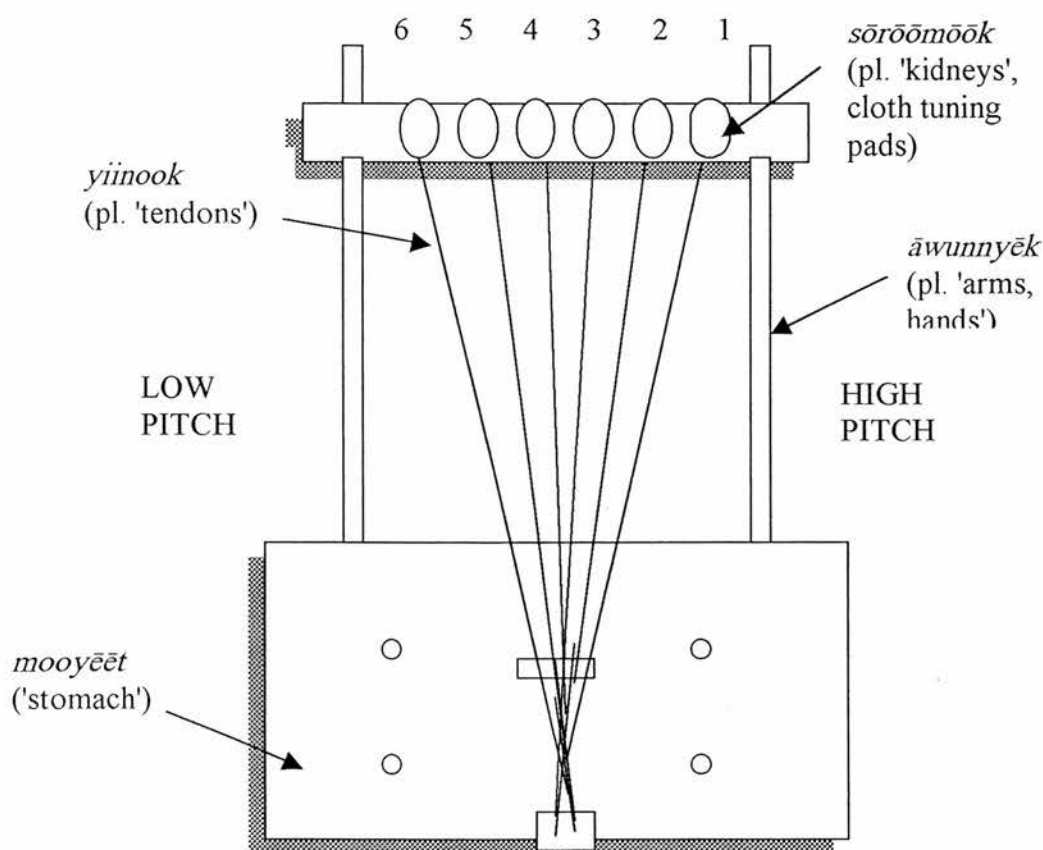


Plate 3e: Numbering of strings on *bukantiit*, showing parts named after the human body

The order (itches) of strings is reversed if a player is left-handed.

¹⁵ Contrast this with other African instruments such as the South African *mbira* (thumb piano), where the lowest register is referred to as *ngwena* (Swahili for 'crocodile'), symbolising the sound of old men's voices (Kebede, 1982:106). The highest string on the *thum* (Luo lyre) is sometimes called *thuon* (bull) because the Luo associate high pitch with strength (Omondi, 1984).

The proportions of the *bukantiit* resonator vary considerably from maker to maker, as do the length of the arms. Size may be dictated either by personal preference, the materials to hand, or perhaps the size of the player himself. There are local specialists in the craft of instrument-making such as Chemengu, but it is also acceptable for anyone with woodworking skills to make their own instrument. Such a person does not require to be gifted with certain spirits, and neither is it expected that instrument-making skills should be confined to a particular family line.

The recent instruments of Chemengu are larger than the average *bukantiit*, his explanation being that "if a person has *energy* in his fingers, he needs a big instrument". It is also possible that the larger guitar resonators, which he makes when required, are exerting some influence. The following chart gives varied samples of measurements in millimetres:

<u>Owner of instrument</u>	<u>Width of resonator</u>	<u>Height of resonator</u>	<u>Length of arms</u>
Chemengu	400	252	323
Hilary Tirob	227	175	252
Larsen	227	201	290
Mang'esoy	300	252	245
Taylor	252	188	265
Taylor	277	150	300

Neighbouring instruments such as the *likembe* (lamellophone widely found in Uganda) often have additional metal 'buzzers' attached to the keys as a source of sympathetic vibration and to increase the aesthetic appeal of the sound. It is rare, however, for such devices to be fitted to the body of the *bukantiit*. In the same vein, the lack of a bridge on the *endongo* lyre of the Baganda people means the strings buzz and slap against the lizard-skin face of the instrument,¹⁶ whereas the strings of the *bukantiit* are suspended above the sound-table on a bridge and vibrate freely. According to Mang'esoy, "purity of sound" is considered highly important for this instrument, whereas the sound of rattles worn on the legs of dancers are pleasing in their own context as they "drive a song on".

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¹⁶ Peter Cooke, 1996:443.

### 3.2.4 Purpose / symbolism / social value

Although the history of the *bukantiit* remains incomplete, existing information regarding the use of this instrument places it firmly within the larger cultural complex of the Sabaot. Traditionally the main function of the *bukantiit* has always been to double and embellish the melody of the singer, and when a player picks up his instrument, the expectation is that a song will follow.

"It is the wife of the voice and incomplete on its own. We think of the *bukantiit* as an instrument that makes people happy, and when it is played, the whole body responds".¹⁷

It is therefore inappropriate to play the *bukantiit* at burial ceremonies, in contrast to certain other groups in Africa where lively music is deliberately used to induce happiness on such occasions. Neither is the *bukantiit* to be used in sad songs such as *chebaabaa* (a historical account of raiding deaths), since the expression of sadness does not go well with the liveliness of the plucking.¹⁸

Lifting of listeners' spirits through song may occur in many ways, perhaps by giving courage during events such as circumcision ceremonies, commenting on relevant topical issues, or providing humour and entertainment during the celebratory phases of various events. It is left to the performer to decide what is appropriate for each occasion.

Celebrations are invariably accompanied by the drinking of alcohol, and Chemengu cannot remember his father ever playing without first taking beer or 'local brew'. It is this association which causes the greatest angst for churches adopting the *bukantiit* in worship songs, although slowly such an attitude is being challenged. Sabaot Christians are learning that when a new instrument is made for use in the church elsewhere in Africa (for example, the *balafon* of the Senufo, Côte d'Ivoire), it can be cleansed of non-Christian associations and dedicated for church use. The manner of doing this is advocated in the book of 1 Timothy 4:4.¹⁹

The gentle sound of the *bukantiit* is particularly suited to the surroundings of the family home as men relax after the day's work and put their thoughts into song. It

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¹⁷ Chelasia, personal communication.

¹⁸ Ditto.

¹⁹ "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer". 1 Tim 4:4-5 (NIV).

encourages the expression of inner feelings for the Sabaot, whereas in other parts of Africa this role is often reserved for the drum.²⁰ Early evening is the time for social visits on the mountain, and before the advent of radios, guests would often be entertained with light-hearted songs as food was being prepared and children listened in the background. Chelasia remembers of his grandfather, "he never sang songs telling us of the past, but preferred those which entertained and made us feel good".

Unlike the nearby Pokot, who have strict rituals of passing on instrumental skills in both performance and construction, there has never been any expectation for Sabaot families to do so in a formal way from father to son. Neither is there any tradition of children from a particular clan being groomed for a life as a musician, nor any expectation that a father should make an instrument for his child, although those that are interested will generally inherit their father's instrument. Of musicians interviewed for this study, only Kororio, Kisinja, Kinyokye and Mang'esoy had taught their sons to play,²¹ whereas others such as Chemengu did not consider succession to be important.

"If a child wants to learn, they need to be 'deadly on music' [show interest] rather than be forced to follow other people's expectations. There are still many players of the *bukantiit* here, it will not be lost".²²

Although I talk of children, the age at which a person begins to learn the *bukantiit* is not important. Rather, it is a reflection of the African pace of life, in which everything has its eventual place and time:

"The gift to play is spiritual, deep inside us, and if it comes out, it will only do so at a certain age".²³

With such relaxed attitudes, it is hardly surprising that knowledge of traditional music skills amongst the Sabaot is unable to keep pace with the rapid influx of other genres.

If the option was available at school, most young Sabaot would elect to learn the guitar rather than a traditional instrument, but sometimes it is only ingenuity such

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²⁰ Bebey, 1975:92.

²¹ Where the *bukantiit* is passed through one or more generations within one family, the players are often nicknamed *Kabukaa* meaning 'people of the foam'. The reason for this is uncertain. A recording of Mang'esoy's children singing is found on CD:35.

²² Chemengu, personal communication.

²³ Quote by Ndiwa, September 1998.



as shown by Mang'esoy that enables a child to get their hands on an instrument. When his father went out to work, Mang'esoy would secretly practise on his father's *bukantiit*, and on entering for a school music competition, he asked to borrow the same instrument. The response was "But why? You can't play!" Mang'esoy then took the instrument and sang to his father, which surprised and pleased the old man so much that he immediately consented. For most players, however, an instrument is generally considered the customised property of its owner, and although borrowing between players takes place, a master musician will not feel happy unless playing his own instrument.

Part of the problem facing the *bukantiit* is that adult musicians have no special role in society that sets them apart to the same extent as itinerant poet-musicians of, for example, the West African Griot brotherhood. These hail from countries with strong cultural traditions, education programmes that strongly promote heritage, and in some cases, a system of patrons such as wealthy kings and chiefs. Amongst the Sabaot, it is only during certain ceremonies that musicians might take priority. There are a few acknowledged specialists in certain song styles who will receive a nominal fee for performing (just as specialist circumcision 'cutters' will be paid), but the majority of musicians must rely on farming or other livelihood opportunities just like everyone else.

That the occupation lacks self-sufficiency does not reflect on the value given to performers. The Sabaot concept of a 'musician'²⁴ is anyone who has some ability for entertaining or leading others in the traditional repertoire, but a 'master' is one who has developed his musical skills to a high level. The reputation of master players is passed down through generations: names such as Harabterere, Mustuni, Samson Lung'ay Kipnoibey, Chemwor Ndiema and Kisinja. As mentioned earlier, there is no particular age group associated with the *bukantiit*, although the initial impression an outsider might gain is that only older people play this instrument today. Kisinja relates how players of all ages used to meet at various celebration events, exchanging skills and songs. Although young people are now increasingly drawn to the guitar, it is clear their respect for skilled *bukantiit* players remains, and it is this which keeps the door open for continuing development of the older song genres.

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²⁴ Ref. Merriam, 1964:67.

Neither is there any specific taboo against women playing this instrument, although those that do so restrict it to within their homes. As there appears to be no desire to challenge this norm, playing the instrument is therefore seen to be a man's role.

In Africa, cultural rites of passage such as birth, circumcision, weddings and death have always been highly important 'life' events, and it is not unusual for instruments with a symbolic role in these ceremonies to be accorded respect. The Luo of Western Kenya consider the lyre as a ritual object with healing powers, with the consequence that "playing [the *nyatiti*] at a wedding ceremony serves both as entertainment and as a blessing" (Anyumba, 1970:28). Amongst the Sabaot, however, this is not the case. The *bukantiit* is seen as the vehicle of skilful music-making, a soother of tensions through its sound rather than any inherent symbolism. The Sabaot say that it has no special powers or properties for curing illnesses or protecting against evil spirits, but Kisinja relates one exception, that of how he came to play the instrument:

"In 1971, the year after I was circumcised, I fell very sick and was troubled by bad dreams. My parents consulted a *Chēēbsookēyoontēēt*, and he ordered I be given a *bukantiit*. Immediately this was done, spirits inside me forced my fingers to play the instrument and I was healed. The choice to play was not my own doing".

Although the *bukantiit* is not venerated in the manner of something symbolic, it is still considered "a very special thing to be appreciated, like a cow that gives milk".²⁵ Respect is accorded to the *bukantiit* in that young children are taught from an early age not to pick up an instrument belonging to an older person in case it should inadvertently be damaged. However, there is no evidence that the *bukantiit* has ever had age-set importance such as the *akongo* of the Teso people in Uganda, which boys learn to make and then play this in their journey towards full manhood. Kubik describes a similar age-set scenario with the banjo of the north-western province of Zambia (1994:344).

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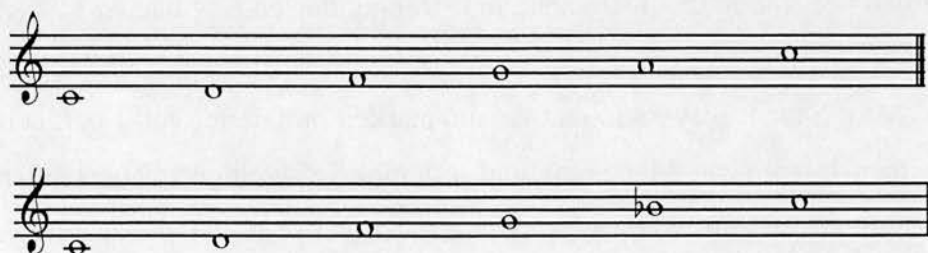
²⁵ Kisinja, personal communication. Good milking cows are highly valued amongst the Sabaot.

### 3.2.5 Tuning

Good tuning of the *bukantiit* is considered the hallmark of an accomplished player, as it helps listeners to feel "*tankas miisin*" (very comfortable). If a player picks up an instrument that is not his own, he will automatically tune it to his own preference if time allows before playing. During this process, strings three and four are usually tuned first, and then plucked in conjunction with adjacent strings to utilise the harmonic relationship of thirds and fourths.

In a sampling of fourteen players of mixed ages, three sets of instrumental pitches emerged. In every case, the tunings from the highest to lowest string covered the span of one octave or less, with the tuning of the highest pitch string showing a greater incidence of variation than others. Within the sets, the individual pitches were sufficiently consistent to be notated here using standard staff notation.²⁶

(i) anhemitonic pentatonic form, with the two outer strings one octave apart. There are two modes, each of which uses a non-equidistant five-tone scale without half steps (Nketia, 1974:118). The tonal centre in both cases is normally the third pitch in the rising sequence:²⁷

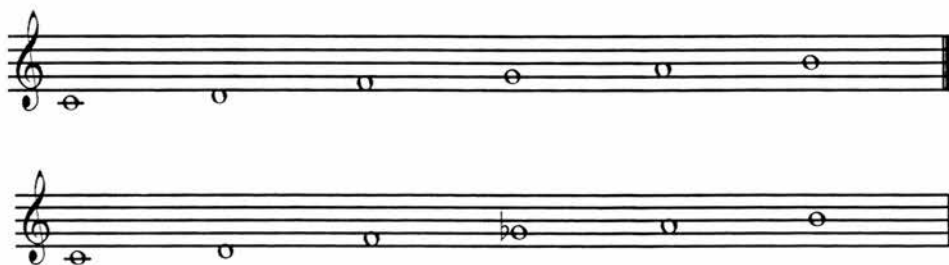


(ii) hemitonic hexatonic form, with the two outer strings a major seventh apart. This six-note scale is also non-equidistant, with special harmonic rules concerning its use in the melodic line of the song. Again the tonal centre in the two modes below is normally the third pitch in the rising sequence:²⁸

²⁶ Approximation to diatonic pitches is discussed later in this section.

²⁷ The first is recorded as being used by Silas Kiprop, Mang'esoy and the Saboti elders; the second by Charlis Naibei Kinyokye and Kisinja.

²⁸ The first is used by Kisinja, Patrick Mang'esoy and Bernard Chuma Mulunda, the second by Stephen Sikiriet.



The difference in the tuning of the first or uppermost string was presented for discussion to a class of Kenyan music degree students (March 2000) at Kenyatta University of Nairobi. None had ever played the *bukantiit*, and they were given no analysis of how such pitches were used in songs. Some had received a rural upbringing amongst indigenous instruments, but all were now very familiar with diatonic scale systems. I was curious to see which instinct would rise to the fore concerning tuning, and the majority decision was that instruments having an interval of a major seventh between the two outer strings were poorly tuned versions of the full octave. Back on the mountain, however, Kisinja (who has had no formal music training) was given an instrument on which the highest string was tuned first an octave above the lowest string, and then a major seventh above. He said both were viable ways of tuning the instrument and strongly denied that one was a badly tuned version of the other.

Most Sabaot players in fact have a marked preference for a particular tuning set on their instrument. Mang'esoy and a number of younger players often use the first hexatonic version, whereas Kisinja and Kinyokye prefer the second version of pentatonic. However, on different occasions Kisinja has recorded the *Mānyirōōr* song using either pentatonic or hexatonic tuning, meaning players can vary their tunings and there can be no assumptions of a particular tuning matching a particular genre.

Octave variance is a phenomenon that is not restricted to the Sabaot. Kubik (1994:58) noted a significant trait amongst the Baganda and Basoga musicians, namely an apparent dislike of the "true" octave. He found this particularly unusual because much of Ugandan instrumental music is based on parallel octave movement (citing the *amadinda*, *akadinda*, *embaire*, *budongo* and *ennanga*). When this evidence is considered alongside Vaughn's statement that "the recognition of octave equivalence is a universal human trait" (1992:464), it becomes all the more important

to ascertain if the Sabaot distinction between an octave and a major seventh is deliberate.

Amongst the northern Kerio valley lyres, Denyer (1980:6) also investigated variance in the octave. Five out of thirty-eight of his samples produced a true octave between the top and bottom strings (that is, within 14 cents or less of 1200 cents), and a further twenty-six were tuned within 70 cents of an octave, meaning less than a half-tone in variance. One could argue this is close enough to be non-significant fluctuation, just as tonal contrast in Swahili is now non-significant and no longer used. However, the Sabaot language still uses tonal distinctions and one would therefore expect its speakers to be more aware of subtleties in musical pitch than a mother tongue Swahili speaker.

All living languages are flexible in their use and often forgiving towards their misuse. The same range of acceptability appears to exist in the tuning of musical instruments. When *bukantiinek* play in ensemble, their players clearly seek to match tuning and "make as one", but differences in interval size of up to 60 cents can remain between players. During a particular recording session of three *bukantiinek*, the variance displayed between one player and his colleagues was as great as 95 cents (particularly in comparison of strings two and three), but there was no indication amongst any of the performers or listeners that this was disturbing. Cooke (1992:124) suggests in his study on pitch perception in Uganda that differences in interval size of up to 80 cents do not appear to be emically significant, and this would appear to be the case amongst the Sabaot also.

It is tempting, therefore, to conclude that these 'acceptable' fluctuations in tuning indicate that the octave variance is insignificant. However, when a variance is persistently used, then the possibility of it being deliberate must be considered. Such is the case in a newly composed song based on a traditional style, in which the singer ignores the uppermost pitch of the *bukantiit* and instead uses a different uppermost pitch throughout.²⁹ There is no inclination for the voice to gradually 'drift' up and match the highest pitch on the *bukantiit*, and it cannot be said the singer misheard the *bukantiit* as it is the same person singing and playing. Neither can it be put down to inexperience as the performer is one of the Mutios brothers, a master player and

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²⁹ Song 48B:122-196, Appendix II, CD:40.



highly skilled in the traditional repertoire. In chapter eight a means of analysis relating pitch to the tonal centre of a melodic line will demonstrate that this contrast of pitch is in fact intentional.

Comparison between the tuning systems of guitar and *bukantiit* reveals a surprising correlation of pentatonic pitches. It is easier to demonstrate this by rearranging the standard tuning sequence of the guitar and transposing a few of the pitches up the octave.³⁰ There is no evidence that the *bukantiit* or the guitar are changing their tuning to match one other as the Sabaot recognise they do not need to.



### 3.2.6 Characteristics of performance style and manner of playing

Although Africans display a considerable affinity for music, it cannot be said that performance ability and degree of specialisation are evenly distributed. Amongst the Sabaot, music is enjoyed by the majority, but there are clearly some that excel as players of musical instruments, some that prefer singing, and others who have no inclination for either. Although Sabaot society is built on an age hierarchy system, respect will be given to any performer who shows ability and has a large repertoire of songs. This has tended to be older musicians, but now a handful of young players have progressed through the national schools festivals and are acknowledged alongside the more experienced performers.

A performer becomes known for their ability to convey a clear message using an appealing choice of vocabulary that fits the melody well. They must also

³⁰ Note this is for illustrative purposes only and does not occur in practice.



have good pitch sense, "handle the wires properly" (have good dexterity on the *bukantiit*), and be able to inspire people to dance.

In a performance where other singers are present, the vocal soloist will usually give way to other singers after a suitable length of time, allowing others to rise to a more prominent level for a brief moment. If the group ethos is strong, the solo voice can become lost in the enthusiasm of the response, the clanging of *ntēekwēyiinēk* (ankle bells) and the general chatter which also goes on during a song session. After a song is over, there is a satisfying feeling that all have participated, with no serious competitiveness other than occasional good-natured rivalry between performers. If a player accompanies other singers, it is culturally acceptable for him to prompt, correct or teach them during the song, perhaps by briefly taking the lead or inserting phrases where space allows.

Certainly the Sabaot are much more tolerant of poor playing than their distant neighbours, the Baganda, who have a considerable vocabulary to describe any weaknesses. The manner in which a xylophone player strikes the keys might be compared to the impact of a tree branch falling to the ground or a noise that frightens away birds; the playing might sound like a broody hen; a rhythm might be too irregular or too fast (Kubik, 1994:54).

Showmanship in any form is considered bad taste, and older players in particular feel ill at ease with the entertainment value given to instruments today. Believing that "a person's thoughts cause him to play",³¹ it is considered ill advised for a short-tempered man to perform in case he loses control of his anger through being fired up by the music. The Sabaot saying at the start of this chapter, *Ibāybooyē biich :bukantiit* ('the *bukantiit* soothes the heart'), defines the desired playing style as soft, reflective and even trance-like. This does not preclude the character of a song changing according to textual content. A quiet beginning may gradually induce body movement as the singer's voice production becomes more vigorous, and if response sections are included, these also become more enthusiastic.

Variants in the performance styles of certain *bukantiit* players become highly stylised hallmarks. For example, a comparison of the playing of Kisinja and Mang'esoy shows that the former employs florid *bukantiit* passages in between vocal

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³¹ Chelasia and Chemengu, personal communication.

sections by means of fast-fingered sequences of notes. Mang'esoy, on the other hand, makes effective use of right-hand glissandi when there is space within phrases.

Although the *bukantiit* is always considered as accompaniment to a vocal line that is normally sung by the player himself, this does not preclude the use of instrumental interludes within songs. Several *bukantiinek* can be combined as an ensemble (the maximum that I have seen is three), requiring the use of cues to enable exchanges between soloists. A singer might tap the performer next to him to indicate the solo vocal part is to be taken over, incorporate a sung cue, or else signal with the eyes. All join in during the response sections, and the instrumental playing continues without break by all the players, regardless of who is singing the solo part.



Plate 3f: Mutios brothers in consort

Established *bukantiit* players prefer to work in regular partnership with a specialist *kiiraanchiinek* (stick beater) player in order "to make the song sound well" and keep a lively rhythm.³² A 'bad' *kiiraanchiinek* player is one who fails to fit with and adequately support the *bukantiit*, but such criticisms are said with the same geniality as the earlier comments on vocal quality. This linking with percussive effects is a common feature of African members of the bowl lyre family such as the *obukano*, where the string player must simultaneously tap ankle bells attached to his

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³² Chelasia, interview.

leg or a metal ring on the big toe of his foot whilst plucking his instrument.³³

Concerning the method of playing the *bukantiit*, two styles are currently in use amongst both the Sabaot and Sebei, and these are discussed in turn.

(i) *Plucking*:

The *bukantiit* is usually played in a sitting position with the instrument either resting in the lap of the performer or held between the player's legs.

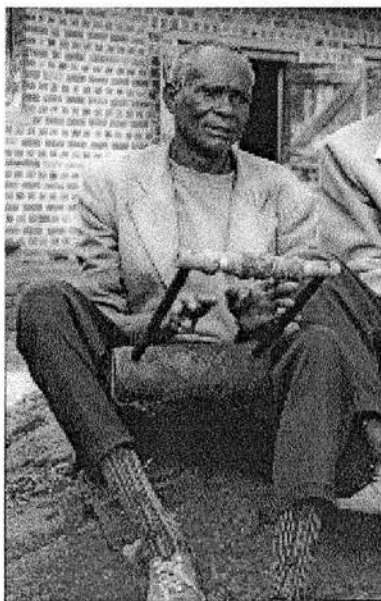


Plate 3g: Traditional manner of plucking

Occasionally a player will suspend the instrument from their neck using a thin cord which allows him to play whilst standing, but this is generally only used in official ceremonial events where the player might have to stand before a microphone with other singers. A cord is also a convenient way to carry the instrument over the shoulder and can be seen on the instrument in Plate 3d.

Without the support of body or strap, the hands of the player are unable to simultaneously hold the instrument and pluck the strings for any length of time. The smallest finger of the left hand curves around the neck bar, while the thumb, index and second fingers are free to pluck. There are many individual variants on this,

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³³ This is bearing in mind the comments at the end of 3.2.3.

depending on the player. Mang'esoy, for example, uses the first string³⁴ as his right hand anchor, but can also pluck this string if needed. During pauses, any of the fingers may be used to damp resonating strings. In general, the left hand concentrates on plucking the lower three strings, but some players such as the Mutios brothers of the Saboti area consistently extend to the fourth string.

The aim in plucking is for melody notes to be played either alternately or together with the appropriate counter notes, although the Sabaot have no specific terminology that can verbally differentiate melody from other parts. Denyer (1980:8) describes the plucked combination of these two lines on the Pokot *pan* as a "simple technique", with the player seeking to make the melody notes the highest and most articulated at any one time. However, there is a sharp divergence in the importance of plucking style between the *pan* and *bukantiit*. With the former, plucking occurs in less than one song out of forty, whereas the Sabaot consider plucking so much their natural style that players are called *butiik* (pl.), meaning 'pluckers'. They also have a specific verb '*but*' (vt.) which means 'to pinch or pluck'.

There are occasions when a *bukantiit* player makes no attempt to create a melodic line as such, but instead uses a series of plucked 'chords' of two or more notes. There is little variation in such cases, and it may be that this manner of playing signifies the performer has less experience. The effect is one of a rhythmic pulse beneath the vocal part(s).³⁵

## (ii) *Strumming*:

In this style of playing, the *bukantiit* is held sideways like a guitar, with the fingers of the left hand hooked around a combination of strings from behind. This pulls them away from the string alignment, leaving the remaining strings free to resonate when the right hand thumb strums in a downward motion. Unlike the plucked style where usually only two strings sound in combination, strumming incorporates three or four strings. The manner of holding the instrument can be seen in Plate 3h:

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³⁴ Ref. Plate 3e. Strings are described numerically descending from the right or highest pitch.

³⁵ An example can be heard on CD:3 (excerpt from song 44A:82-102).



Plate 3h: Kisinja demonstrating strumming technique

There is also a variant in which the *bukantiit* is held in the plucking position facing the player, the right hand strumming whilst the left hand forms chords from behind the strings.



Plate 3i: Another manner of strumming

Some articles on lyre playing techniques refer to the strings being 'damped' by the left hand,³⁶ but this is not strictly the case with the *bukantiit*. Neither do players stop

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³⁶ For example, P. Cooke 1996.



strings at harmonic nodes.³⁷ The only exception is that some performers will occasionally make a rapid slide with the left hand after a pluck in order to create a glissando from earlier sound resonance. I have never seen a plectrum being used on the *bukantiit*, in contrast to Peter Cooke's observation (1996:445-452) of these being used on lyres in northern Uganda, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

A number of theories have been voiced as to the origin of chordal strumming, the earliest date being suggested to me by Kisinja as 1918, although there is no supporting documentary evidence of this:

"The circumcision of a first-born girl was about to take place, but while the elders were singing the night before the cutting, the candidate unexpectedly gave birth. Because of this she could not be circumcised, so the elders took another girl in her place. This was a bad omen for the parents of the first candidate, so the master musicians devised an alternative instrumental style to their usual plucking in order to mark this as a unique situation".³⁸

The significance of this date, if true, is that it predates the arrival of guitars and therefore would need to be considered a traditional style.

A clue may lie in the assumption that common usage usually results in the development of vocabulary. There is no Sabaot word for 'strum' apart from *komur bukantiit* meaning 'sideways *bukantiit*', and only the Swahili *kupiga nyusi* (lit. 'hit the strings') is used to describe the playing style. Kavyû (1998:624), however, designates strumming as the Kalenjin norm, and some older Sabaot musicians such as Andrea Ndiwa and Kororio remember their fathers using this technique. Chemengu, on the other hand, remembers his father saying he would never adopt the 'modern playing', maintaining that strumming was not a feature of traditional *bukantiit* pedagogy.

All the older players today are familiar with the technique, and although some occasionally use it, most describe it in rather derogatory terms as "women's style", implying a weaker, non-technical manner of playing. Amongst the young players, the opposite applies, with some never having learnt the plucking technique. A few of the more experienced players such as Kisinja and Kinyokye will happily switch from one technique to the other when the occasion or type of song suits, the advantage

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³⁷ Floyd, 1999:179, referring to the *enchamunge* lyre of the Samburu.

³⁸ Interview, 22 September 1998.



being that no change in tuning is required. Several chords can be created from the existing tuning sets as used in plucking.³⁹

It appears Sabaot lyre performance lies on the boundary between two large playing style regions. Strumming predominates in Sudan, Ethiopia and northern Uganda, whereas the majority of Bantu groups including the Baganda use plucking. In addition to the different methods of plucking and strumming, many players claim that minor regional differences in styles of playing exist. According to one theory, lowland Sabaot (amongst whom the *Book* dialect predominates) such as Kisinja use a faster style of playing which matches the manner in which they speak, whereas *Mosoobiisyēk* speak in a more deliberate manner that is mirrored in their playing.⁴⁰ In philosophical mood, the Sabaot elders offer another reason: the more recent *bukantiit* songs have faster tempi to match the increasing pace of life, forgetting the more leisurely ways of former generations.

"Our fathers used to pluck very slowly, but today people hurry, play faster, and use new styles such as strumming".⁴¹

However, in studying transcriptions, there is little supportive evidence that the tempi of 'fast-style' songs are any different to other songs, although it is true that Kisinja fits more vocal syllables into his narrative song phrases than Kinyokye and uses a more lively finger plucking action. Both the vigour of finger movement and rhythmic density can easily give the impression of speed, and Kororio, the oldest man on the mountain, provides support for this by saying it is not overall song tempi that have changed but the finger action which has become quicker.

### 3.3 Other traditional sound instruments

#### 3.3.1 Chordophones

Zithers and one-string tube fiddles are not instruments common to the Sabaot, but in addition to the *bukantiit*, there is the single-stringed ground harp (also called a ground-bow or earth-bow). This is known to the Sabaot as *kibtiilteet* (also

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³⁹ Recorded examples of the contrast in plucking and strumming techniques can be heard on CD:28 and 29. Both are played by Bernard Kipsamii, an accomplished performer in his mid thirties.

⁴⁰ Patrick Mang'esoy, interview.

⁴¹ Voiced by Ndiwa and Kisinja on separate occasions.

*kibtiiltiilyeetm* or *kibtiltēt*,⁴² and is played by children, particularly female circumcision candidates.

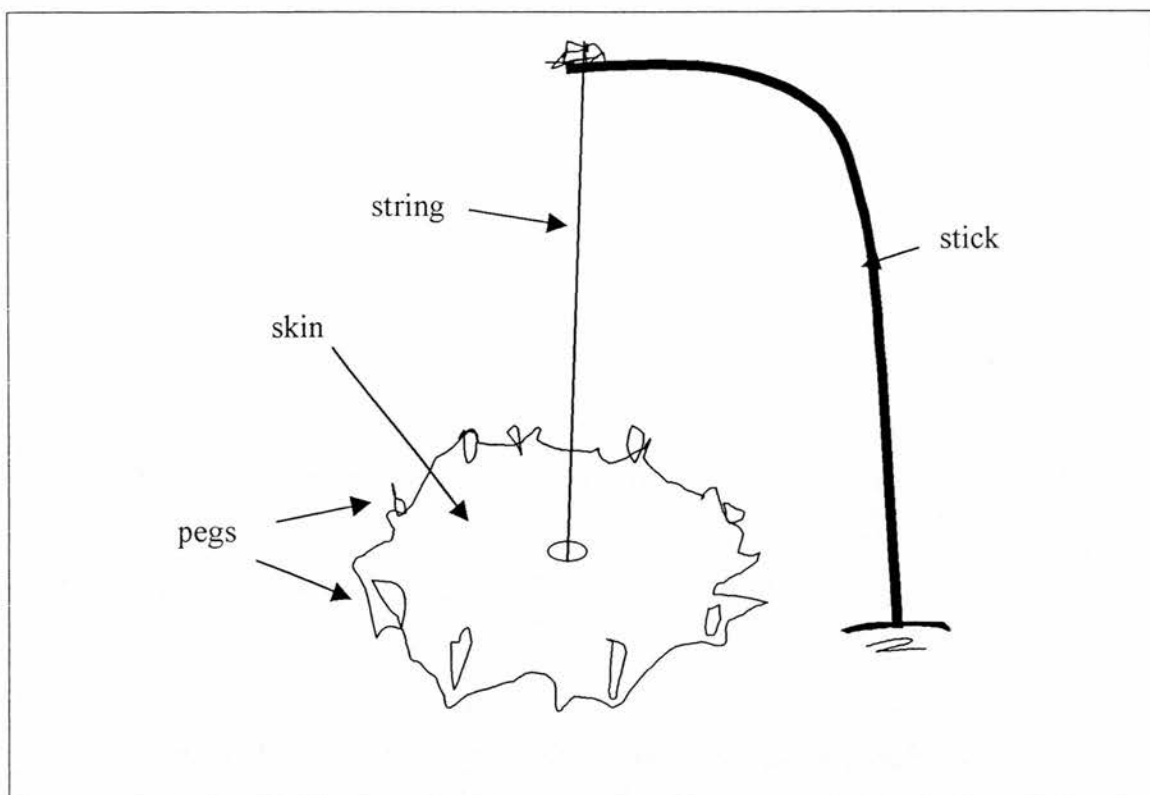


Plate 3j: *Kibtiilteet*

From a resonator hole in the ground, a string passes through a soundboard of calf or goat skin to a flexible stave. Sound is produced either by plucking near the resonator or by tapping the string lightly with a stick. Pitch can be changed by depressing the top of the stick in order to shorten the string length, sliding a finger on the string, or by pinching the string at various points. In all cases, the sound is small. There is no portable Sabaot version to match the Kikuyu *nderemo*, which uses a hollow wooden trunk as the resonator, and this instrument should not be confused with the South Asia plucked drum whose resonator is independent of the ground.

The *kibtiilteet* is an instrument that fits the 'something from nothing' category (Brown, 1990:275), being a resourceful creation easily created from available materials. Similarly, drums are often constructed out of food containers, and

⁴² David K. Rycroft (1984:79) attributes this instrument to equatorial Africa but does not include Kenya in his list. It is possible the *kibtiilteet* has crossed from Uganda via the *Sebei*.

*kiiraanchiinek* (stick beaters) may be anything percussive that is to hand. The important aspect of such conversions is that they are the means to realise culturally determined sound ideals, and it is not coincidental that there is similarity in timbre between the *kibtiilteet* and the earlier versions of the *bukantiit*.

### 3.3.2 Idiophones

This classification includes instruments in which the sound emanates from the vibration of the solid substance of the instrument itself. Amongst the Sabaot, all such instruments are sub-classified as having indefinite pitch, but some are shaken and others beaten. There are no gourd shakers amongst the Sabaot, but three other shaken idiophones are or have been used.

The *ntēekwēyiinēk* (pl.) or *ntēekwēyiit* (s.)⁴³ are ankle rattles whose design has undergone some transformation due to the arrival of soda bottle tops on the local market. The traditional version is a set of six metal bangles worn by women on their ankles.

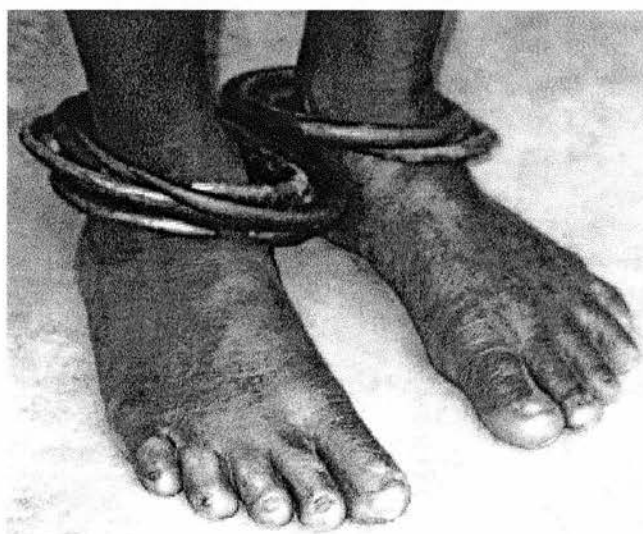


Plate 3k: Traditional *ntēekwēyiinēk*

The more recent version consists of bottle tops threaded on wire, and is renamed *bucheencheyiit* (s.) or *bucheencheyinēk* (pl.). Both versions are often used by women in public ceremonies such as post-circumcision celebrations.

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⁴³ Sometimes spelt *Ndekwoyit* or *Ntēekwoyit*, these being dialectical variants.



Plate 3m: *Bucheencheyinēk*



Plate 3n: Close-up of a *bucheencheyiit* showing bottle tops pounded flat

*Bhurkurook* (pl.) or *bhurkuryēēt* (s.) are thigh rattles or leg bells that comprise a hollow iron sphere with one or more smaller iron balls inside. They are tied to the dancers' legs with leather straps, and unlike ankle bells, are only worn by men. The demise of many ceremonies means these have now been replaced by the *filimbi* (a borrowed whistle) amongst young people during circumcision.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ A generic illustration is given in Wahome, 1993:51.

The third type of shaken idiophone is the *twolyondet* (s.) or *twolik* (pl.), sometimes referred to as *twoniki*.⁴⁵ The *twolyondet* is similar to a *bhurkuryēēt* but is used by male or female initiates who are preparing for circumcision. It exists as two variants, the first being a metal open bell with a small iron clapper suspended inside, pierced at one end by a wooden handle. The other version is attached to the wrist of the initiate by a leather loop, with the bell section being similar to that of the first.

Of those idiophones that are beaten, only one is common amongst the Sabaot.⁴⁶ The *kiiraanchiinek* (pl.) comprises a small wooden board and two wooden beaters. Because there are three active parts to this instrument, it is always referred to in the plural version of the name (singular would be *kiraanchiit*). It is used only in combination with the *bukantiit*, and such songs are considered incomplete without it. As with the *bukantiit*, it is nearly always played by men, although women are not barred from doing so except in formal ceremonies.



Plate 3p: *Kiiraanchiinek* in top left-hand corner next to the *neembeyit*

⁴⁵ Senoga Zake, 1986:167.

⁴⁶ The Sabaot Dictionary (1996) lists *sukuuk* meaning a 'limp ideophone'. Mang'esoy corrects this to *surkuuk* but is unable to describe the instrument.





The Sabaoth use the *neembeyit* in other contexts such as entertainment, but on

In all cases, the *neembeyit* is small, typically ten to twelve inches in length,



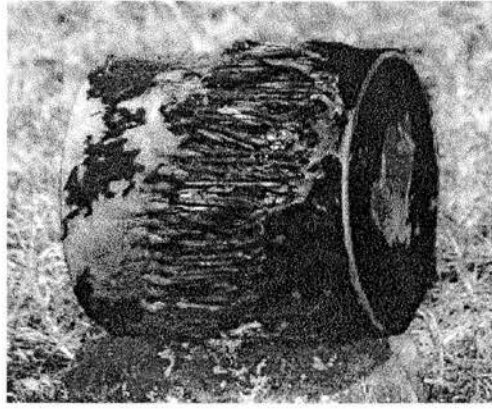


Plate 3r: *Neembeyit*

The generic Sabaot term for any other drum, particularly those used in churches on the mountain, is *kiriinkēēt* (*kiriinkoonik* or *kiriinkōōsyēk*, pl.).⁴⁸ These instruments are believed to have been introduced by the Bukusu, are double ended, shallow in depth (3-6 inches), and ten to eighteen inches in diameter. When supported in front of the player with a strap, they are played with a single stick on one side and struck with the palm on the opposite side.



Plate 3s: *Kiriinkoonik*

⁴⁸ Some Sabaot would call this a "town drum".

### 3.3.4 Aerophones

There are five aerophones⁴⁹ known to the Sabaot or their close relatives the Sebei.

The bull-roarer is an instrument described by Goldschmidt (1976:291) from verbal accounts amongst the Sebei. It is "about a foot long and five inches wide, fabricated out of monkey skin, and swung by a thong to which a handle is attached". Floyd (1999:169) also credits the same instrument to the Kipsigis. Although I have not found anyone amongst the Sabaot that can remember such a device, it is likely to have had a similar role as with the Sebei in imitating the sound of a lion roaring during the *ng'ētunyto* ceremony. Goldschmidt recounts how each male Sebei initiate was taken separately into the bush at night and made to take hold of the 'lion' and twirl it until tired. "The instrument is not supposed to die down gradually but to be dampened suddenly", thus creating fear in those listening.

The *kuurēruut* (pl. *kuurēruunēk*, also known as *nkarasuut*) is a small vertical notched flute with three finger holes, made from either the *chēēbkastit* tree or the *teekaanteet* (bamboo). I was unable to locate this instrument to determine the manner of sound production, but was told it is only played by young uncircumcised children to amuse themselves whilst watching cattle. A few Sabaot also remembered the name of *kiintiit* (pl. *koontiinēk*) as being another name (or form?) of flute, but no other information could be found.

The *aryeembuut* (pl. *aryeembuunek*) is a side-blown curved horn of eland, roan antelope or kudu, without finger holes. It was formerly used by Sabaot men-folk to signal impending raids and summon warriors,⁵⁰ but is now reserved for occasional use in pre-circumcision and general entertainment songs. Another horn with an ox bladder insert is called *amupepe* (likely to be a dialectical version of *arupepe*) and is described by Akuno as originating from Elgon,⁵¹ but is not used by the Sabaot.

The defining of what constitutes a musical instrument returns us to the origins of music and the use of "socially useful artifacts" (Brown, Merker and Wallin 2000:10). Whether these are two rocks struck together to create rhythm or an

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⁴⁹ Instruments in which the air itself is the primary vibrating agent.

⁵⁰ Floyd (1996:172) points out that the horn is not used in a "musical" way by all tribes.

⁵¹ Akuno and Karonji, 1992:69, 73.

elaborate keyboard,⁵² in every case the perception of the listener in a specific context is the definer of musical value. For this reason, Floyd (1996:169) also discounts the bull-roarer as a musical instrument, being the imitation of a "fierce animal sound in an attempt to frighten circumcision candidates". There is certainly nothing in existing accounts of this ceremony to indicate the instrument has any musical role, but it would only take the word of one participant to change that.

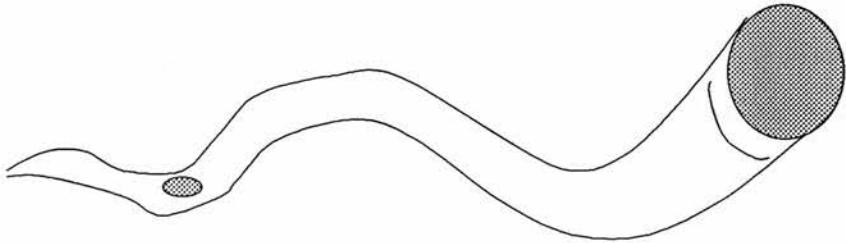


Plate 3t: *Aryeembuut*

Another aerophone is the whistle or *filimbi* (Swahili), an instrument widely distributed across East Africa but of uncertain origin. Amongst the Sabaot it is solely reserved for pre-circumcision dances, and excellent illustrations of the modern metal version or 'police whistle' as commonly used amongst the Sabaot are given in Goldschmidt (1976, album 4 no. 2). Metal is likely to have replaced wood in the early 1960s, there are no finger holes, and some varieties have a pea inside.

There are three common rhythmic patterns used: a blast on every pulse; a short then sustained blast; or a series of short blasts interspersed by rests:

Pulse	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	
<i>filimbi</i>	x x — x x —	or
Pulse	1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4	
<i>filimbi</i>	x x x x	

There is also occasion of a song in triple metre,⁵³ in which the *filimbi* are as follows:

Pulse	1 2 3 1 2 3
<i>filimbi</i>	x x — x x —

⁵² The word 'instrument' specifically meant a keyboard in 16th century Germany, whereas the generic term of 'musical instrument' encompasses earlier sound-producing objects.

⁵³ Song 41A:380-383, CD:30.

In closing, it needs to be noted that in nearly every instance, the instruments described here are disappearing from use. Those that are relatively secure at present are the *kiriinkēēt*, now adopted for worship purposes by the Christian church, and the *filimbi*, which will survive as long as the circumcision ceremony remains in practice. Despite being widespread across the mountain, the *bukantiit* and *kiiraanchiinek* are showing signs of becoming endangered species unless they are able to adapt to alternative spheres of value and use. Their cultural function has been redefined by lessening functionalism of various traditional ceremonies, changing interests amongst the younger Sabaot, and the considerable influence of the church. They are symbolic of a way of life that is fast disappearing, and as such, will need to be redefined in role and value if they are to continue to have relevancy in Sabaot society.

That this can be achieved is not in doubt as the Sabaot have considerable creativity in the area of musical expression, demonstrated not only in the complexity and variety of their traditional song genre but also in their ability to rapidly absorb the guitar and various incoming song genres. As a group they remain relatively compact in distribution, and the musical choices made by a few soon touch everyone in their midst. Whether several music genres can find a balance within this culture that is itself undergoing considerable change is not yet known, but it is likely to depend on how the Sabaot perceive the role of music in their midst today.

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## CHAPTER 4: A SURVEY OF GENRES IN THE CORPUS OF SABAOT TRADITIONAL SONG

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*Tuuyēē :leekwa ng'al nyoo imiinyē mēt tyēēntaab kwaan.*

A child who keeps the song of his father in his heart will stay strong.

*Lit.* Faced with child-problems who closes his head to the song of his father.

Proverb by author, translated into  
Sabaot by Mang'esoy

### 4.1 The Sabaot conception of music and performance

Blacking (1973:7) has posed that cognitive processes genetically inherited as a "species-specific trait of man" are responsible for people's capacity for defining and organising sounds into music. However, the interpretation and response to auditory experiences is just as likely to reflect the cultural factors to which people have been exposed. As with the bullroarer mentioned in the preceding chapter (3.3.4), deciding whether particular sounds constitute 'music' will depend on parameters chosen by each culture, including social acceptability, recognisable patterns and communicative value.¹

One of the indicators of how important something is to a culture can be found in the number of specific vocabulary references that exist in their language. The Iduna people of Papua New Guinea have some sixty different words to describe the qualities and varieties of yam, an essential part of their existence. Likewise, the Sabaot language has a considerable vocabulary for describing the genres, characteristics and uses of the music in their midst.

Music to the Sabaot is understood as a combination of song and dancing and there is no specific term that simply means 'music'. The need to create a blanket term appears to be "a useless abstraction",² since the call of a bird is as much music as the sound of voices. The Sabaot see little need to distinguish further, and words for 'dance' and 'sing' are often interchangeable as the meanings are readily understood. They are also the starting point for ethnomusicological study rather than the analytical evaluation of the outsider.³

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¹ Also ref. Merriam, 1964:27ff.

² Keil, 1979:27.

³ Merriam, 1964:31-32.



<i>Table 4a: Sabaot terms relating to music and dance</i>		
<b><i>Sabaot</i></b>	<b><i>Literal meaning</i></b>	<b><i>Extended sense</i></b>
<i>kituum kōōrēēt</i>	a term that roughly translates as 'singing and dancing in community, using the entire body'	It is a good term to cover the traditional Sabaot music spectrum, implying something that is so sweet, people cannot resist dancing. <i>Kōōrēēt</i> implies plurality or 'all the country'
<i>tuum</i>	'to dance'	It also implies 'to sing', as any dancing event usually incorporates singing, although it may follow later
<i>tuumēēt</i>	adjective meaning 'the act of dancing'	
<i>tuumiintēēt</i>	one who can sing, play an instrument and dance (equivalent to 'a musician')	
<i>tyēēn</i>	the verb meaning 'to sing'	includes the sound of an instrument, a bird or a human being. (Note: an instrument never 'speaks')
<i>tyēēntaab</i> <i>bēsyōōsyēchu</i>	'songs/ dances of these days'	refers to songs of other people (secular), either instrumental or non-instrumental
<i>tyēēntaab Kanisa,</i> <i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>Kanisa</i> OR <i>tyēēnto</i> <i>nyēē kēēsiltēē Yēyiin</i> OR <i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>kāākastaayēēt</i>	'Church songs' or 'songs for praising God'	refers only to hymns and chorus style songs
<i>tyēēntaab kēny</i>	'songs/ dances of old days or days of our fathers'	refers to Sabaot traditional music, either instrumental or non-instrumental
<i>tyēēnwōōkik</i> (pl.) <i>tyēēnto</i> (sing.)	noun meaning 'songs'. This is normally used by Sabaot to describe <i>all</i> music. In the Sebei dialect, the plural term is <i>tumwonik</i> , clearly similar to Sabaot	can mean 'songs' of either traditional or borrowed origin, but is used in a very generalised sense. <i>Wook</i> (n.) means 'ways or alternatives'
<i>tyēēnwookik kitaabuut</i>	'Book of Songs' or 'Psalms' (as in the Old Testament)	suggested title to be used in the translation by SBTL

The word 'music' is referred to many times in the Bible and Sabaot translators have needed to find cultural equivalencies. The following table gives



some examples from the New Testament, and includes back-translations of the Sabaot versions to show how a Sabaot reader contextualises the English. Words that are often used include *biiko* (people) *chēē tyēēnē* (who sing).

Table 4b: English/Sabaot equivalents relating to music		
Source	NIV English translation	Sabaot version and back-translation into English
Ephesians 5:19	Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...	<i>Ōtyēēnchinē Mokoryoontēēt ām mooyēēt akeenke...</i>  Sing to the Lord from your stomach...
Luke 15:25	When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.	<i>Nto yu kēēyēēw kaa, kukas kutyēēnē :biiko.</i>  And when he came back he heard/saw people singing.
Revelation 18:22	The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again.	<i>Mākoy /bākēēkāsyiing' bēsyēēt ake biiko chēē tyēēnē ānkōōbutē bukantiinek āk chēē kuutē kuurēruunēk āk aryeembuunek.</i>  You will never be seen/heard with people who are singing and playing <i>bukantiinek</i> (lyres), <i>kuurēruunēk</i> (flutes), and <i>aryeembuunek</i> (signal horns).

Before considering the typology of traditional songs, consideration is needed of ethnoaesthetics, being those performance traits that combine to create a good song in the opinion of a Sabaot. Some relating more specifically to the *bukantiit* have been mentioned in chapter 3.2.6.

The primary determinants, listed in order of importance by musicians on the workshops, are the message (text), the melody and the rhythm. All of these components will be considered in later chapters, but added to these must be a sense of spontaneity concerning when a song is sung. The impetus during most song occasions is triggered by the arrival of a key person in the event, and is often followed by someone launching into song.

In performance, Sabaot singers do not employ techniques such as vibrato to alter the natural timbre of their voices, and neither a soloist's vocal quality nor the blending of different voices is seen as overly important. If anything it is the opposite

that appeals, and the high reedy vocal lines of women can provide startling contrast above those of men. Enjoyment and group affirmation are more important than commenting on the tonal quality of a soloist's voice, and if a person should sound rough on a particular occasion, it is not considered an affront if another singer eventually takes over. Any allusions made as to the vocal quality of a performer are of a humorous nature such as:

*Kēēriich Maliing'a :teket.*  
Maliing'a's chest is wheezing.

The voices of Sabaot singers are generally strong and spirited, and variations in dynamic range are not consciously employed in traditional songs. Some singers can appear somewhat introverted to start with, but a sense of occasion soon comes to the fore as each song progresses, with emotions reflected in the singer's faces and body actions.

There are a number of special vocal effects used by the Sabaot that do not fall under timbre. Voice masking does not occur in any ceremony (where the voice is disguised behind an instrument or mask) but a singer can imitate any voice or animal they choose. Shouts, animal calls, vocables such as "mmm", "ēē" or "brrr" on a rising tone, and even grunts occur during a song. Sudden accents on words to emphasise strong beats and spontaneous whistling or hissing through teeth are also used. Ululations, or high pitched vocables produced by vibration of the uvular, are supposedly the domain of women but Sabaot men also occasionally utter them. All of these devices are the traditional indicators of musical involvement, appreciation and emphasis, but are seldom added to church songs.

Some players such as Kisinja combine their sung message with more dominant use of certain strings on the *bukantiit*, this indicating to other singers that a climax is approaching which needs to be marked by one or more ululations. "When the women recognise this, they ululate".

<i>Table 4c: Sabaot terms relating to use of the voice</i>		
<i>Sabaot</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Extended sense</i>
<i>barak</i>	up, sky, heaven	a high voice
<i>ruum</i>	to make a sound like an engine	the low, deep voice of a man

<i>tenten</i>	thin	means a soft and clear quality rather than high (woman's voice)
<i>kaareestooytēēt</i>	a smooth voice	may refer more to the style of the song than vocal quality
<i>rāru tyoon kōōchēēt</i>	to cut a story	to recite a text or story

The Sabaot often use literal expressions for manner of performance. For example, there is no general term meaning to 'play' any instrument, but instead there are references to specific ways in which sound can be produced.

<i>Table 4d: Sabaot terms specific to the bukantiit</i>		
<i>Sabaot</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Extended sense</i>
<i>but</i>	to pluck or pinch	to play a bukantiit
<i>chechine barak</i>	to pluck high	plucking the higher pitched strings
<i>chechine ng'wēny</i> (1) <i>/kābutyi ng'wēny</i> (2) - indefinite form, 'doer' unknown	to pluck low	a deep sound from the lower string(s)
<i>rat</i>	to tie	tuning the bukantiit by adjusting the tension of the strings on the vertical crossbar
<i>yiinook chēbo kwēen</i>	to pluck in the middle	plucking the middle strings

<i>Table 4e: Sabaot terms relating to instrumental performance and tuning</i>		
<i>Sabaot</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Extended sense</i>
<i>bīr</i>	to hit (1)	to play a percussive instrument
<i>kōnykōōny</i>	to hit (2)	beat a drum with a stick
<i>kuut</i>	to blow	to play a flute or horn
<i>mumuuliit</i> (n.), <i>mumuuliinek</i> (pl.)	drum beat	
<i>ruuny</i>	to press	to play a keyboard instrument
<i>wuuyte</i>	to strengthen	to tune any instrument to a specific pitch

An instrument played for any length of time on its own is considered incomplete and meaningless in the Sabaot context, as is a song without words. With the exception of the *kuurēruut* (flute) used by children whilst herding cattle,

instrumentalists focus more on the words that accompany their playing than on the complexities of the accompaniment: "While singing, my mind is within the song, thinking only of the words. I don't picture a melody line or chords on my instrument, my fingers just find the notes".⁴

This apart, the Sabaot seldom verbalise the process of structuring a new song, and it is difficult to find a local musician who can explain the parts of any particular song form.⁵ This does not mean that such a process never takes place, only that their preference is to articulate the qualities for skilful performance over compositional criticism. Neither can it be said that people with a capacity for imitative oral transmission have weaker analytical skills, but rather that they have different defining parameters than those used in musicology for comparative study of world musics. Just as a child cannot explain anything about clause structure in their mother tongue but can speak it fluently, it is more likely that those that have had considerable exposure to their own traditional music demonstrate an instinctive familiarity with structural and compositional features.

In the absence of verbal reasoning, it is possible to test for awareness of structural distinctions in song genre. I played a series of recorded excerpts to Sabaot musicians to see if they could recognise the type of song from listening to the instrumental introduction. Although it was only elders who were able to respond, in every case they identified the song before the words began.

"It is the same way as we can tell from a woman's scream what is happening, even though we are not there to see. The type of scream differs according to whether a child has died, an enemy is approaching or she is being beaten".⁶

It is difficult to ascertain whether the Sabaot have a concept of aesthetic beauty of sound. Ask them what symbolises beauty and many will say "a woman". They distinguish between a good and bad singer, but say the decision is due more to the choice of words than the timbre or tuning of the voice. Singers will volunteer for a solo even when their voice is cracked and barely recognisable, but two rules ensure they receive due attention from all present. It is culturally abhorrent throughout many groups in Africa to cause someone to 'lose face' in public, and it is even more

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⁴ Quote by Joseph Morongo.

⁵ The problem of description is one for musicologists as well as informants.

⁶ Kisinja interview, September 1998.

important that elders are not criticised. The affirmative option is to allow everyone their share of the limelight, hence another vocalist will take their turn in due time.

## 4.2 The role of music amongst the Sabaot

There is considerable departure between the roles of song of traditional and recent genres. The former teach a wide range of folk-lore and practical matters relating to life amongst the Sabaot, to which schooling provides an additional tier of skills. A few older Sabaot feel national education supplants rather than supplements, in that it ignores the social codes of order, status and procedure which are important aspects of Sabaot life. Traditional songs have always been a primary teaching source of these, and even in singing, regulations of cultural relationship norms are strictly adhered to, such as during the *Sēēryēēt* song-set where dancers line up according to seniority.

Traditional songs also have a number of secondary or underlying functions such as motivation, solidarity, rebuking and recreation. Songs can be sung during boisterous socialising or in more intimate family surroundings. They condition the mind before times of danger such as raids, raise morale, and bring calm and release of tension after difficult times.

Whereas once there was a strict song 'etiquette' governing when and where certain songs could be sung, now the rules are relaxing. It is acceptable to take songs from ceremonies such as twins praise, circumcision and weddings and use these as general entertainment, and it is no longer necessary to sing praises when approaching the home of a mother-in-law⁷. However, the rules for use of instruments remain more fixed: on occasions such as warrior blessing, work activities and certain parts of the circumcision ceremony, the *bukantiit* is not to be played, and there is no relaxation of this.

The societal ethos of group involvement is carried over into music-making with most Sabaot song events encouraging participation of everyone present. Blacking's theory (1971(i):104) that structures of music genres can be paralleled with social structures correlates with Sabaot music, in that call and response mirrors individual and community. However, the paucity of Sabaot musical data pre 1900

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⁷ As told by Kisinja.

makes it difficult to determine the history of this particular song structure in relation to patterns of social interaction.

During group performances, a soloist may sing until another vocalist feels an acceptable time has passed and it is now their turn. The exchange happens without a break, and gives opportunity for further variety to be introduced into the melodic line, giving new vigour to a song that may have already lasted for ten or more minutes. Songs with instrumental accompaniment will have an introduction on *bukantiit* and *kiiraanchiinek*, after which the vocalist gives the opening lead by singing one or more solo phrases and then the response part. Several helpers may join in at this point to help establish the response, and this informs those present of the song structure without the need for preliminary discussion. Everyone now knows the subject of the song, the shape and length of the solo phrases, and the response that they are then expected to pick up. As the soloist warms to his theme, more people join the response, the first signs of body movement begin in singers and listeners alike, and if the song is appropriate, dancing follows.

A young Sabaot composer learns his or her art through trial and error and group involvement. They will combine the patterns learnt from listening to others, noting what is socially acceptable. Those who have 'made' a new song are then responsible for passing it on to others, and as mentioned in chapter 5.2, it becomes the possession of the community and the individual composer is forgotten. Amongst the neighbouring Karimojong⁸, ownership of songs brings prestige to the composer,⁸ whereas with the Sabaot it is the skill of a singer and performer which is more valued. Whoever is leading a song becomes the composer or author of whatever song they are leading, no matter how well-known it is, and anyone is free to copy and adapt the song on subsequent occasions.

Inherent in the role of music is a component of performance visuality that has links with artistic expression in general. The Sabaot have few examples of art created for its own sake, and with the exception of body painting, use it more for adornment

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⁸ Gourlay, 1999:93.



of functional items.⁹ Their art is linked to the same value system as their music and the same difficulties exist with transplanting it into new contexts. To use music as an example, a work song is sung for a particular purpose and the Sabaot are clearly mystified if asked to sing the same song in the context of a recording studio.

Because of a similar functionality, Sabaot art is also of a transient nature, and examples are hard to find. The most resilient statements would be expected in cave or rock paintings, particularly as the Sabaot used these for dwellings in their early history, but only one example has ever been documented.¹⁰ Other searches have revealed deep scoring on cave walls, but these are created by Sabaot herdsmen cutting into the stone to enable their cattle to lick the salt residues, whilst elephants use their tusks for the same purpose.

The arms and cross-bar of a *bukantiit* are occasionally carved with spirals or semi-scalloped patterns, whilst edging with brass pins and scorching of the front belly is also seen. For now the Sabaot are resisting a temptation prevalent in other parts of Kenya to produce carvings, masks, paintings and musical instruments as pastiches to satisfy a gullible tourist trade. Their feelings for artistic expression and symbolism are modest, but nevertheless valued by their creators.

#### 4.3 The importance of dance

In Africa, body movement is often inseparable from music-making, hence the naturalness of quotes such as "my fingers dance on the guitar".¹¹ Agawu (1987:403) believes that Africans do not suddenly "become rhythmic" in their dancing and music, but incorporate it into even the most mundane of everyday work movements or the repetitive signification of elaborate greeting formulas. The Sabaot exhibit an obvious physical response on hearing a traditional song, and passive listening is an

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⁹ In the days when warriors were still active on the mountain-sides, each carried shields of buffalo hide painted in bold designs using ochre and other soil colourings, but there are now only a few examples of these remaining in museums and private art collections. Items currently used in ceremonial settings such as milk gourds or bowls are often decorated. Patterns are burnt into the hard surfaces much like branding cattle, and the tobacco container and gourds used for *Chōōlyēēt* have intricate beading. *Mosoobiisyēk* women also weave bamboo baskets for sale in the markets, adding decorative seedpods to the edges of the finest examples. In the home compounds, clay cooking and water pots bear few decorations other than occasional indentations on the rim, but some houses have bright patterns painted directly onto the dried cattle dung.

¹⁰ A cave frieze depicting long-horned humpless cattle, a breed no longer found in the highlands.

¹¹ Taken from Kubik, 1994:37.

alien concept. "We know our music is hitting people when they start to move, when they forget their quarrels and when they smile".¹²

Although an amalgam of clans with different histories, commonalities in dance and music styles serve as bonds amongst the Sabaot. Men joke that if they do not "dance well, high and properly" no woman will be interested,¹³ but they take dance seriously whether or not women are present. When a mixed group, men and women follow different movement patterns. With men, movement revolves around one general profile, namely the 'body centre' of neck and head,¹⁴ spreading down the spinal column into the legs. There is no squatting action, rolling or full body contortion as in many other parts of Kenya, and facial expressions are not used. Instead, the movement grows as the song unfolds, beginning with minute undulations of the head and neck. The dance then develops in stages according to the occasion or type of song, and various terms are used to describe the intensity of movement:

(i) *kaankacheet* refers to the first signs of dance, being a gentle neck undulation.

(ii) *tuumto* signifies that neck and shoulders are moving more vigorously, together with a body 'ripple' from knees to neck. It can be done either walking or standing still, and is also a non-specific name given to any singing and dancing that takes place either before or after circumcision.

(iii) *nkach* incorporates a wider range of body movements, including swinging of arms forwards and backwards, and a rhythmic bending of the knees to give an undulating effect. There can also be stepping from side to side.

(iv) *raan* ('jump') is the climax of the dance in which men stand on one spot and jump upwards whilst keeping their legs together. Another term some Sabaot use for this action is *ancholit* (the meaning of which is unknown).

The history of the distinctive head and shoulder movements is uncertain, but it has to be said that cattle exhibit very similar movements when walking, creating a comparison which the Sabaot do not discount. There are also similarities with the dance styles of cattle peoples such as Maasai and Samburu. However, the Sabaot do not give any ritualistic significance to their dance movements unlike, for example,

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¹² Charlis Naibei Kinyokye.

¹³ Kisinja, personal communication.

¹⁴ Term used by Dauer (1967).

the Akan of Ghana, who have some forty symbolic gestures involving all parts of the body.

The sequence and momentum of men's dance is directed by the voice of the solo singer rather than a lead dancer. Kisinja remembers a young people's dance that provided entertainment for young people of both sexes and was led by the *motirēnik* of circumcision training.¹⁵ Regardless of whether non-verbal cues are given, there is considerable personal choice in all song events as to the choice or intensity of responding movement. It is seldom a unified group action, and perhaps only a handful of men during a song will reach the *raan* stage. All, however, are clearly enjoying the experience, smiling throughout.

Women have a very different movement consisting of small forward steps that correspond with the pulse of the song. This stepping action is primarily for the *ntēkwēyiinēk* rattles attached to the legs of women, but there are variants such as raising and lowering the heels on the ground. They will also swing their arms up across their body in a curved, fluid arc, adding occasional extraverbal elements such as hand gestures or waving of small branches. There is no indication that the lack of jumping and relative restraint of their movements are designed to demonstrate societal submissiveness, and unless the event is *mēliilto* or *ng'ētunyto*¹⁶ which require single sex participation, everyone socialises and dances together. A dance ends when the singing stops, sometimes after an hour or more, although there is no evidence that choreomania¹⁷ ever occurs.

Depending on the occasion and type of songs, other movements may occur during dances such as men raising sticks on each pulse. These actions reflect warrior days, although the group imitation of spear thrusts has been deliberately toned down.¹⁸ Work songs sometimes incorporate pounding or stooping movements, but when sung in their functional context, such actions are not intended to be dance. Amongst instrumentalists, a *kiiraanchiinek* player will never dance, whereas players of *neembeyit* or *kiriinkēēt* will sometimes enter into spirited movements. The

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¹⁵ Kisinja was unable to give any further information on this dance or the accompanying song. It is likely to be similar to that described in section 4.4.2.1.

¹⁶ See section 4.4.2.2.

¹⁷ The compulsion to dance continuously until spirits and ills depart. Cf Kebede, 1995:40, and also the dancing mania of tarantism.

¹⁸ The occasional cattle raid still occurs and no-one wishes to be accused of incitement.

*bukantiit* player restricts himself to head movements, as he is generally seated during performance.

Kubik (1972:29) is concerned that transcription of just the audible aspects of songs will cause this integral part of the music to become lost, but a Sabaot musician can just as easily perform a song in a more perfunctory manner without body movements. A preference for dance does not necessarily mean a song is incomplete without it, and as yet, evidence indicates that such responses remain as inherently natural as breathing to the Sabaot.

In addition to traditional dance, there are two other categories of dance found amongst the Sabaot today, but comments on these are reserved until chapter five.

## **4.4 Traditional song genres in their cultural setting**

### **4.4.1 Choices in typology classification**

This section is devoted to the anthropological features of various traditional song genres, illustrating when songs can be used, and giving what folk background I have been able to elicit. I do not claim this typology to be complete, but it is at least a framework.

My initial thoughts on constructing a typology of Sabaot traditional songs anticipated specific compositional features that would link all the music sung at one particular event or ceremony. Although there is some evidence for this, there are more Sabaot life events than actual song typologies. The Sabaot prefer to differentiate their songs by the event they were initially linked to, and this is how songs will be classified here.

A number of alternative typologies have been considered, such as differentiating between genders. There are a number of specific songs for solo men and women respectively, of which the responses are often mixed gender. However, these are relatively few of these songs, the men's being *ng'ētunyto* (lion ritual) and *tyēenwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt* (warrior); the women's being the *mēliilto* ritual (post-circumcision) and *sōōsyoo* (marriage).

The Sabaot also know that certain songs should never be accompanied by an instrument, but as these constitute the majority of their ceremonial music-making, to adopt such a typology here would create an unbalanced division and over-broad



categorisation. For example, the unaccompanied songs include those for war and work, lullabies, pre-circumcision and other young people's songs, post circumcision first-born, *sōōsyoo*, twins confinement, purification and naming ceremony songs. The accompanied are those of entertainment, *Mānyirōōr*, *aroosyek*, *mēliilto*, *ng'ētunyto*, and some children's songs. For the same reason, type and frequency of use of instruments and categories of musicians will not be taken as a determinant.¹⁹

Kaemmer (1993:36-42) suggests a taxonomy based on the performer's intent and social constraints. A song would be "individualistic" if motivated by self pleasure, love or anything personal to the singer such as a name-sake cow, whereas a "communal" song would involve more than one person and have little distinction between performer and audience. Songs could also be "contractual" (sung at weddings or public events), sponsored by means of long term musical patronage, or designed for a commercial music industry. Although the first three categories apply to Sabaot songs, the others are only incidental occurrences, leaving a similarly unbalanced taxonomy.

Gourlay (1999:93) suggests a categorisation system that is similar to Kaemmer's but with only two determinants. The first is traditional songs sung by groups within the community on ceremonial occasions, and the second is songs sung by individuals and based on events which have impressed or had "traumatic significance" for that singer. This distinction between community and personal songs could indeed be used with Sabaot repertoire, but is a little unpredictable in this time of transition from group ceremonial events.

Others such as Catherine Gray (1995:144) appear to leave the cultural aspect to one side and use compositional features to create categories such as "double stanza form", "stanza/refrain style" and "liturgical text set in responsorial style". Musical styles are clearly a possible determinant in Sabaot songs, but to ignore the cultural aspect would give an incomplete picture.

In this typology I have not attempted to list song categories in order of importance as perceived by the Sabaot traditional society today. Rites of passage such as initiation, marriage and death are considered major milestones in any African

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¹⁹ Ref. Merriam, 1967: chapter 5, for commonality or 'cluster theory' using instruments as a characterising trait for a particular group of people. Zemp (1971) proposes taxonomy through classifications of musicians, using socio-musical questionnaires.

person's life, and most Sabaot similarly acknowledge the need for some form of ceremonial expression to mark the first two of these events, based on highly complex family chronologies and cultural patterns.²⁰ I realise that I have included more material on circumcision rites than other categories, but this is because the rite is still widely practised amongst the Sabaot, and consists of a number of stages each of which require separate description.

If a song is known by a specific title, this is likely to have been 'lent' by the occasion with which the song is most associated. For example, the circumcision ceremony is sometimes called *saakweetaab wōōnsēētāāb lēēkōōk* (the circumcision of children), and its songs borrow part of this title to become *tyēēntaab* (or *tyēēnwookikaab*) *lēēkōōk*, meaning 'songs of children'. Many songs are grouped in sets of four and each set is given a title, as for example, *chōōlyēēt* or *sēēryēēt*. When these sets are sung during other ceremonial events, the sets keep their original titles.

Within the sets of four, individual songs are known by either a key-term or phrase used in the song. Entertainment songs accompanied by the *bukantiit* are not grouped in this manner, and rather than these having separate titles, it is more customary for the performer to introduce such songs within the musical introduction: "I am going to sing a song about....". Because songs change from singer to singer depending on the emphases that different performers give to a topic, it is hardly surprising that there is little consensus shown in song titles and most musicians don't bother with them. The ceremonial categories tend to have titles that can be at least recognised by a participating group, whereas incidental or more personalised categories such as entertainment, lullabies and work songs have less importance.

I have been unable to find any Sabaot who can explain the significance or symbolism of the number four in relation to groupings of songs, age-set sequences and repetition of oaths. One theory proposed by an elder in Saboti is that this number represents the four corners of the mountain, in keeping with the Sabaot concept of togetherness and communality (hence the term for traditional music, *kituum kōōrēēt*.)²¹

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²⁰ Goldschmidt (1976, 1986) and Fish (1995) have provided comprehensive studies of Kalenjin customs, much of which can be cross-related to the Sabaot.

²¹ See table 4a.



The final point under classification choices is that the number of Sabaot who know how and when music should contribute to various ceremonies and can guide proceedings is decreasing. The skilled song leader knows which songs are mandatory at a particular event but may also include a range of other songs. Some songs such as narratives or the *sōōsyoo* song-set can be sung in a variety of contrasting situations, meaning structural typology gives only half the picture when considering the Sabaot traditional song genre.

#### **4.4.2 Life-cycle rituals that incorporate song**

##### **4.4.2.1 *Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk* (circumcision / clitoridectomy songs)**

Circumcision or *wōōnsēētāāb leekook* is an initiation into adulthood, and considered the oldest of the Sabaot traditions. It is usually held during the long school holidays in December, and is considered one of the most important doorways to societal acceptance in a person's life. After undergoing circumcision, a boy is now responsible for the security of his family and clan group, whilst a girl is considered ready for marriage.²² Increasing numbers of church families now arrange for boys to have the operation at a local clinic, but girls have no such choice: female clitoridectomy may be outlawed by the Kenyan Government but it is still practised by many ethnic groups including the Sabaot.

There are several phases to circumcision, ranging from initial preparation of the candidates, the ceremony itself and post celebrations. Events may differ according to the location, but songs feature at all of these stages, with the lead singer(s) substituting names and events to fit the circumstances.

##### *(i) Approaching circumcision*

Young boys and girls who reach puberty no longer sleep in their parents' huts but move to 'dormitories' called *sikiroonyti*. The sexes in these used to be mixed, but pressure from national schooling has now brought segregation. The parents and family elders interview every child who reaches puberty to ascertain if they wish to undergo circumcision. The choice is voluntary, but peer pressure and family

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²² Only the circumcised will be later accepted as leaders. Traditionally, an uncircumcised person is not regarded as a clansman or member of society.

precedents can exert a strong influence. Parents then meet with family and clan members to decide a date.

Once the time for circumcision is chosen, a 'tutor' or *motiryoontēēt* is appointed to mentor each set of candidates through the next few months. If it is a mixed group, there will be one *motiryoontēēt* for the boys and one for the girls, responsible for maintaining general morale and teaching the candidates the various songs and dance movements required for circumcision. The success of the ceremony depends on thorough coaching, and candidates are drilled to the point of exhaustion as showing fear or pain is a discredit to the families represented.

For one or two weeks prior to the 'cutting', groups of candidates parade through villages and homesteads in their area. Some of the boys still wear a traditional headdress of black and white colobus monkey fur, but with such animals now officially protected in Kenya, these and other decorations are often 'lent' by the circumciser. Alternatively they might wear colourful cloth hats, scarves and shirts, strings of shells across their shoulders, and fur plumes waved on the ends of sticks. Any exposed skin is daubed with intricate patterns using a paste of white clay from nearby caves, a sign to the candidates that this is an event to be taken seriously, and indicating to the wider community that circumcision is pending. Each male candidate also carries a stick symbolising the Sabaot warrior's spear, and some wear a metal ring called *mukuuryoontēēt* attached to their wrist or ankle to mark them out from others. These are removed after circumcision.

In this pre-circumcision stage, singing is primarily used to focus the candidates on the implications of the celebration ahead, as well as to promote solidarity and bonding amongst the group. These songs have easily recognisable features, using a call and response structure of regular phrases that match the semi-trotting pace of the group. At times the singing is entirely substituted by the vigorous blowing of whistles (called by their Swahili name of *filimbi*)²³ which every candidate wears around their neck. Playing of the *bukantiit* is not allowed before the circumcision event as the candidates are considered too young to handle such an instrument properly in public.

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²³ Ref. song 41A:288-313, CD:1, also CD:30.



Plate 4a: Mixed group of circumcision candidates, Kobsiuro

(ii) *The day preceding the circumcision event*²⁴

An ox belonging to the host family is killed near the ceremony site, suffocated with soil in its nose. The chyme (stomach contents) and entrails are then spread on the ground on top of large leaves where they are read for propitious omens, and the meat is taken away for cooking. Lowland Sabaot sometimes slaughter a sheep rather than an ox, and also prefer to cut its throat rather than use suffocation.

The group of candidates makes a final tour of nearby homesteads, singing and blowing whistles as they go. Later in the afternoon they convene at the ceremony site, which, if a first-born is being circumcised, is likely to be their family compound. The candidates begin a dance which is more of a relentless march forwards and backwards across the ceremonial square of approximately twenty feet in width. Their stride is so fast that it is almost a jog, and when they reach the opposite side of the square, they bounce with feet together, turn together and stride back to the other side. The deafening unison blasts from their whistles match their pace, and the constant repetition to and fro is deliberately trance-inducing and tiring. The *motirēēnik* will constantly chide and encourage if anyone loses pace, but if a rest is genuinely

²⁴ Much of the following description is taken from a circumcision ceremony held on 13th December 1998, organised by the family of Stephen Cheuno in Kobsiuro.

needed, it is acceptable to remain on the base line and rejoin the others a few minutes later.

A crowd gathers to watch whilst food and *mayyeek* are prepared by women nearby. Eventually the candidates are approached by a group of older men, the leader of which scoops up a handful of chyme from the stomach of the sacrificed ox and spits on it as a blessing. It is then smeared on the face and body of each candidate in turn, a sign that from now on there is no turning back.

A group of elderly women urge them on by singing songs, each taking turns to lead the solo sections. Asking bystanders for the significance of these gender distinctions in particular songs brings the familiar answer: "They have always been sung like that". However, it is likely to be a role link, particularly as the women will also sing the four *sōōsyoo* (marriage) songs to the candidates around this time. These songs are full of practical advice for young people who are about to leave home, and such instruction is considered to be very much the domain of women.

The songs also speak of what is to come: "Something heavy waits for you tomorrow, but it is nothing to fear. Only a minute of pain, what is that?" At some stage during this penultimate day, it is customary for a *motiryootēēt* to dig a small hole at the ceremony site and insert special herbs inside to placate any spirits that might seek to disrupt proceedings.

### *(iii) The night before circumcision*

The candidates sing and dance for most of the evening, whilst male relatives and friends gather in a nearby earthen hut. In the centre of the floor stands a large clay pot of *mayyeek*,²⁵ fermenting and bubbling from the action of the yeast. Men use long straws to drink, some nearly six foot in length. These are traditionally made from a local hollow vine with a small filter at the end to strain out the coarser grains of millet, although plastic tubing may be used instead. The liquid level in the pot is topped up from time to time with boiling water, and when it eventually becomes too dilute, concentrated *mayyeek* is added.

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²⁵ In this ceremony, *mayyeek* has become a substitute for milk. Previously it was only fathers of circumcised children who were allowed to drink during such events, but now many younger people and women also partake. The candidates are forbidden from drinking any alcoholic beverage, with the exception of a small cup before the actual circumcision.

Communal well-being is prevalent and the entire event is relaxed in appearance with intermittent singing and people either sitting or reclining on the ground. At some point a song from a category known as *chēēmoomo*²⁶ will be sung. This is to invite relatives and visitors to bring gifts such as food and tobacco the following day, important parts of the post-circumcision ceremony:

*Ōkuur chēēmoomo ēē, ōkuur chēēmoomo ēē woy ēē.*

Call for the circumcision candidate's mother to come and bless her children.

*Ōkuur kutuwēn ēē, ōkuur kutuwēn ēē woy ēē.*

Call her to come and bless the candidates.

*Kutuwēn ēē tōmōtēt ēē, wōy ēē.*

With the tobacco.

*Kutuwēn saramēek wōy ēē ō wōy ēē.*

Call for her to come and bless the twins.

When it is time to eat, special parts of the ox are reserved for guests of honour such as *Nkiyyowēy*,²⁷ and the remainder of the meat is then served to the other guests, accompanied by night-long celebrations, drinking and occasional moral laxity.

#### (iv) Circumcision

Highland Sabaot dwellers begin this part of the ceremony very early in the morning, whereas lowland people may wait until the afternoon. The candidates are taken to a nearby river where they stand in the icy waters, the resulting numbness providing a crude anaesthesia for what is to follow. By sunrise they return to the square where a large group has gathered, including many young children who are encouraged to see

²⁶ Two of these can be found on the accompanying CD: 48A:275-308 (CD:2) and 44A:82-102 (Appendix II, CD:3).

²⁷ *Nkiyyowāy* is a person specially chosen to be the chief ceremonial friend and life mentor of the newly circumcised person. He or she must be a close family friend, but neither a relative nor the same age-set as the candidate's father. Their role will be as second Uncle (or Aunt), counsellor and financial helper rolled into one, so it is essential the newly circumcised respects them. The appointment is marked by a formal gathering held a month or so before the actual circumcision event. After *Nkiyyowāy*, there is a descending order of men appointed to special roles for the post-circumcision ceremony, who can be of the father's age-set, his clan or even relatives. They include:

(i) *Āmōng'ō*, meaning 'the friend who brings a bull as part of the circumcision ceremony'.

(ii) *Āsubēēn* who brings a ewe to the ceremony (unlike other Kalenjin tribes, the Sabaot seldom use goats for ceremonial purposes).

(iii) *Bāā mērēēng'*, meaning 'the friend who brings a ram'.

(iv) *Antowo*, 'the friend who brings a heifer'.

Their relationship with the candidate must always remain in good standing from this point on.



what is expected of them in later years. There is much singing, again led by a group of older women:

*Ōrōōr kēēltaab chēērōōbēy.*

This continuous way is for everybody.

*Ōō kookoorir wē bōrōryēēt ēē,*

Oh community, it is now dawn,

*ōrōōr kēēltaab chēērōōbēy.*

this continuous way is for everybody.

*Kēērīrēē koong'asiis ēē, ōōy, ēē yaa,*

It is now dawn on the eastern side,

*ōrōōrkēēltaab chēērōōbēy.*

and this is the way for everyone.²⁸

Circumcision songs also provide an important commentary on social expectations. They remind the candidates of their clan lineage, that it is a blessing to be brave and not flinch, that they will soon be adults:

"Do not show any signs of fear

At the circumcision ground

Do not risk derision and laughter

By cowardice.

Be brave my friend

Be an example to the others

Be brave my friend

So others will want to follow you".²⁹

Each must be circumcised by someone of their own sex, but the ceremony will occur simultaneously for male and female. Ten years ago or less, the circumcisers would have been local *Mosoobiisyeēk* taking on themselves the blood pollution as part of their once perceived mystical attributes, but it is now more common for *fundi*³⁰ circumcisers to be hired from other people groups such as Bukusu. The role of the circumciser is highly specialised and those who undertake it are said to have been 'called' to the task by a spirit. Along with the candidate's mentor, the circumcisers are paid money for their services rather than sheep or cattle.

Within some families, there may be a gift of money or a cow for those candidates who show courage, but if they cry, this is considered a bad omen and brings shame on the entire family. As older children can understand the implications

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²⁸ Song 38A:81-94, a demonstration sung by Kororio at his home.

²⁹ Taken from Chesaina, 1991:121. I have no recording of this song.

³⁰ Swahili term referring to anyone who specialises in a trade or craft.



of this better, parents sometimes encourage their children to wait several years before undergoing circumcision.

The events are swift and well rehearsed, and all singing stops. The candidates are silent, their features trance-like, waiting in turn for the knife. Unlike some other African tribes, the Sabaot do not elect a 'sponsor' or close friend to hold them, but the *motirēēnik* will be close attendance, encouraging them to be brave. When all in the group have been cut, they are offered a bowl of liquid and some herbs before being led away to begin a time of seclusion, cleansing and final instruction. Behind them is general rejoicing amongst the crowd of onlookers, with perhaps green bananas or maize cobs thrown into the air to signify blessing. When all eventually disperse, a *motiryootēēt* removes the herbs from the secret hole and seals it with cow dung.

*(v) Post-circumcision celebration, for those not first-born in their family*

A more relaxed celebration follows later on the day of circumcision, in which people reconvene at the homestead of a relative of one of the circumcised to eat and drink.³¹ The newly circumcised are absent, having been taken away to recover from their ordeal. Entertainment songs are often sung at this time, and if available, instruments will be used for these songs. Themes range from serious to light-hearted, from humorous imitations of animal calls to history songs, and the singers ask that unity, blessings and wealth that will come to these new members of society who have endured pain. Well-known songs include:

- (i) *Aa sey! liimo* (praises animals as they are taken out to graze in the morning before milking)
- (ii) *Wōō siiyeet* ('the hoof of the cow is big')
- (iii) */Chēē māchomē kuram bēy* ('when opponents come to attack, we defend ourselves. We are not men if we let them steal our animals. Those who don't want to drink beer can draw water'.)
- (iv) *Kaabaybayeet ku woo tilyeet* ('friendship brings happiness').

*(vi) Post-circumcision ceremony for the first-born girl (or boy if the parents have no daughter)*

The circumcision of a first-born girl is a very important event for the father's age-set as it marks a pending brideprice. Many relatives and clan affiliates of the father come

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³¹ Goldschmidt (1976:290) downplays this part of circumcision amongst the Sebei, referring to it only briefly as "a beer party". He makes no mention of any additional value being given to the first-born.

long distances to attend, taking advantage of this time together to include discussions on many social issues. Many of the women still wear a *sērēkēēt* (traditional leather skirt) and *ntēēkwēyiinēk* (ankle bells),³² whilst older men wear a cloth knotted over one shoulder and carry a stick in lieu of spear. Younger men prefer town clothes with jackets.

The post-circumcision celebrations begin when the visitors gather for food and drink in the early afternoon. Two sets of four songs are sung in sequence at this time, although the sets may be separated by several hours. The order depends on the locality: highland areas sing *chōōlyēēt* followed by *sēēryēēt*, but in Cheptais some prefer to begin with *sēēryēēt*. *Chōōlyēēt* songs symbolise friendship and unity, and usually run into each other without a break:

*Chōōlyēēt* song set:³³

1. *Āryo kwēyo*

2. *Chōōlyēēt*

3. *Kimoorikē*

4. *Chēēbnyōkōōswō* (refers to a type of monkey that lives on cliffs. This fourth song is sometimes called *Ōoryo kwēyo*).

In the accompanying dance, the men form a circle and move anticlockwise with a slow shuffling step, whilst the women move in the same direction but in an outer circle using a livelier foot action for the *ntēēkwēyiinēk*. It is acceptable for men and women to take turns in singing the solo sections, and all join in the responses, further signifying the social bonding of this event. The cue for the change to the next song comes from the soloist, the change in response is immediate, and often there is no break at any point between these four songs.

In the midst of the circling dancers sit a group of important people drinking milk from decorated gourds (see plate 4b). They include the father of the circumcised and *Nkiyyowāy*. Near to them is a bowl filled with loose tobacco, into which people step forward to push offerings of money. These are gifts intended for the newly circumcised and the host, hence the reference to tobacco in the earlier *chēēmoomo* song.

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³² See plates 2f and 3k.

³³ Song set 42A:1-192. A sample can be found in Appendix II, CD:4.



Plate 4b: *Chōōlyēēt* ceremony. The tobacco bowl is on the right

The *sēēryēēt* song set is also sung by all present. The dance style is very different to *chōōlyēēt*, the men using a spirited shoulder and body movement and thrusting their sticks into the air. The overall tempo, however, is more solemn, and although ululations are frequent, no *ntēkwēyiinēk* are used. Instead, the women move into a separate group and dance in circles using small steps. At some point in the first song, the men form into two parallel lines and whilst still singing and dancing, file into the house of the host. The leaders of the line wait inside until the last of the line has squeezed through the door, then all emerge again singing the final song of the set.

As before, singers exchange the solo sections and the songs run into each other without a pause. The subject matter of *sēēryēēt* songs is considerable, summarising the importance of the circumcision event as the gateway to true 'membership' of the Sabaot society, and recognising the most important guests. No *bukantiit* is ever used in either of these song sets.

*Sēēryēēt* song set:

1. *Miyaat cheebtuuy moo* (Proverb: 'someone with a black stomach is very bad', referring to an envious person)
2. *Bēēlyoontēēt* ('elephant')
3. *Cheemanar aroyiin ku akeenke* (meaning of this song is uncertain)
4. *Āruus :Teeta chēēbkēēru* (Proverb: 'a grey cow is like a mist')

After the singing comes a time of socialising and drinking, and several hours later, the minor guests disperse. The last to leave is *Nkiyyowāy*, the chief guest.

The following are the words of the first *sēēryēēt* song:³⁴

[chorus] *Yyōō yēē aa, ēē*

[solo] *Kibootyo chēēbkuy mēēkumii kōōr.*

*Chēēbkuy* have vanished and they are no longer in the world /area /vicinity.  
*Nyēēng'woong' tulwēēt ku mukuul, bin nee bini wē.*

The whole mountain is yours, oh dear.

*Moomo ēē, bo binta lamuran.*

Which age-set is this?

*Subaayyoo mooyēēt akeenke, ng'āloolē wērikaab Cheebkitaali, kiwo koorēēt amkooliiny*

It is for real men, greet for me people /men of the same womb, the sons of  
*Cheebkitaali* (place).

*Emēēt āno wē koonyoo ēē, kēēng'āloolo muutyonko, tuubcho :ng'oo nee ākoo ng'oo.*

Country /time /day is coming to the end. Which is the other place /area [that we value] we humbly ask? Who is related to whom?

*Kēēng'āloolē wē kōōnyoo, kēēng'āloolē biikaab tulwēēnyoo, subooyywoo kōōtaab*

We men of the same house say it, we men of our mountain say it, greet for me the entire house of

*Kāālēēnchiin, ng'āloolē :mooyoonēēb cheebyoosya, moyooni kiyi chii, woogyoo biikaab*

Kalenjin, the men from the womb of a woman say so, the womb that bore a man /person,

*Kāālēēnchiin, ng'āloolē wērichēēb chēēbōkōōs, kiwo kōōrēēt ankooliiny, subooyywoo wērichēēb Tinkēywo.*

These are the men of Kalenjin origin, the sons of *Chēēbōkōōs* say so. The day is coming to an end, greet for me the sons from *Tinkēywo* in the west.

[participant] *Ōbooyē chēēbtaab Tēr.*

You belong to the daughter of the clan called *Tēr*.

[solo] *Kiiwo kōōrēēnyoo ankooliiny. Orub mōōyēēk choo minkēēch, nto /kēēyi amakiikeet kiwo*

Our time /place is coming to an end. Let the youth follow suit, it is good to have a smooth delivery without suffocating the infant

*kōōrēēt ākookoy, soboon tukul ku akeenke, kiwo kōōrēēt ākookoy, kaacham :anii kibooreet nyoo*

this world has no end but there is only one life to live, this world goes on and on, I really love our first-born child

*kookukōōnēēch wuurwēēnyoo, kiitērēertooy sēēkuutiin, akoosoot mōōyēēk choo minkēēch.*

She /he has given us our shelter, we rebuke the evil one, [please] remember /consider /treat well the youth.

³⁴ Only the first song of the set was recorded (42A:268-328, CD:5) as I could not enter the hut. As always, texts are adapted to the situation, particularly in the choice of clan lineage names.

[participant] *Kibaano ichEEK murēnik choo nkiiche.*

Where are other heroes who preceded us?

[solo] *-Māāmachē :anii bēērbēēryēēt, -māāmachē :anii mōōrōōryo, kaacham :anii nyoo sikēn nyoo*

I dislike being fooled, neither do I like unrest, I love someone who is gentle /generous

*kookukōōnēēch wuurwēēnyoo.*

The one who has given us our shelter.

[participant] *Yyōōch, aki! kiiyaam nkinyiing' chēēmōōkēēt ake?*

Go away, have you ever killed a bib ox?

[solo] *Kyāābērē kiiwē buch, kēēbēēchi keey muutyoo, bēētii mōōyēēk ku minkēēch. Kiirērēētooy nyoo*

You went without, [now] let us move on slowly, the youth [initiated] go while they are still young. Cursed is

*tuuy moo, nyoo tuuy mooyēēt ku bōōniin, nto /kikēēyi amakyaMounta,*

the envious one, the envious one is a witch, how I wish to bear a child without a blemish.

*Kēēmiitē acheek kōōto āriit, soboon tukul ku akeenke, nto /kēēyi ama /kiike, /Sikēēmwooy kule nee.*

We are in the house, there is only one life span, it is good to have a smooth delivery without suffocating the infant.

*Sikeyey kule nee, otyookyi kurēēri. Wookyoo nyoonki chaas baant, soboon tukuul ku akeenke*

What can we do, release the calves to suckle. This is the age-set called *nyoonki* "jazz band", there is only one life span

*tyookyi mōōyēēk kurēēri, keeng'uny kariitaab nyoonki, tyookyi naara kurēēri, kārōōtunēē tulwo tuuy,*

so let the calves suckle, *nyoonki*'s car is on the run, please release the calves to suckle, they [cows] are descending from the black/dark hill [coming home]

*kārōōtunēē cheebyong'oos.*

descending from the gloomy hill [covered with dark clouds].

(here the singers file into house).

Following circumcision, the new initiates are considered unclean until the ritual of *lābchi* (meaning 'to be cleansed') takes place. After three to four days, the initiates are checked by the circumciser, have their heads shaved and their bodies washed in a mixture of water and urine by people who have been nominated to feed and care for them. Goldschmidt (1976:286) reports use of a drum to accompany women's songs at this time, almost certainly the *neembeyit*, but I have been unable to record any reliable examples.

A few days later when healing allows, the initiates venture out into public. There are restrictions as to where they can go and who they can talk to, but initiates will sometimes sing ribald songs, competing with one another in vulgarity.



#### 4.4.2.2 Closing ceremonies: *mēliilto* and *ng'ētunyto*

Some two to five months after circumcision, the initiates undergo a final transition to adulthood and formal adoption into their age-set. This was traditionally marked by separate ceremonies for girls and boys, but these are supposedly no longer practised and the last to have undergone such a ceremony is said to be Kororio. It is highly likely that in the more remote and higher parts of the mountain the closing ceremony continues, despite the church exerting considerable pressure for its demise. An alternative ceremony known as *ng'ētu*³⁵ is sometimes held during the seclusion phase of post-circumcision, which enables anointing and age-set recognition to take place.

The women's closing ceremony is called *mēliilto* (the leopard),³⁶ and the men's is *ng'ētunyto* (the lion). Owing to their secretive nature, both are held at night, and *mēliilto* begins with a group of women singing praise songs to alert men and others to keep away from the area.³⁷ When darkness falls, the *neembeyit* is played as a friction drum, imitating the growl of 'the animal' (leopard is never mentioned) in the bush. A *bukantiit* can never be used in either the men's or women's ceremony.

During the evening other songs may be sung, including one called *ntēkwēyit*,³⁸ named after the *ntēkwēyiinēk* rattles or iron rings that the women wear on their legs during dancing. This song is not specific to *mēliilto* events and can be sung at any celebratory event where women are present, being known by several older men.

The significance of the leopard and lion are not known, but they inspire fear in that both ceremonies involve trying to catch the animal in a figurative sense. It may also be that the spirits of these animals give special powers. Additional aspects of these rituals continue to test the resistance of candidates to pain, and *mēliilto* also involves the older women passing on powers to use *ntōōyēēnik*, special herbs that are used to curse or bewitch men. Because of this, only circumcised women who have

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³⁵ The word means to change from one state to another (transformation).

³⁶ This leopard ritual is not related to the *mabe* 'leopard' society of the Igbo, Nigeria.

³⁷ See song text examples in chapter 7.3. Also ref. 41B:324-345 (CD:6, Appendix II).

³⁸ The text of this song (44A:7-38, CD:7) is given in chapter 7.3.

previously 'caught' the animal are allowed to attend, although a male *tēkēryoontēēt* (a 'special child')³⁹ can be present if he pays money.

During *mēliilto*, female initiates are each given a symbolic piece of clothing made from animal skin. Whilst kneeling before a group of their women elders, they are sprayed with a chewed mixture of tobacco, saliva and milk, and anointed on the head with butter. Each in turn is then taken aside and asked to recognise the age-set to which they now belong. The initiate remains quiet as the age-sets are recited in chronological order, and only when the correct one is reached do they respond. They are then cautioned that from this time on they are no longer children but mature 'new people', required to respect the members of their age-set, their elders, their in-laws and all others in society. As dawn approaches, the leopard must return to hiding and the sound of the drum fades.

*Ng'ētunyto* is similar to *mēliilto* in content and purpose but with specific teachings for men. Instead of the *neembeyit*, a bull-roarer is used to imitate the sound of the lion,⁴⁰ an instrument that never serves any other purpose amongst the Sabaot.

When circumcision is finally concluded in all its parts, initiates are considered adults but still lack certain rights. They can no longer enter their parents' house, although interaction is still allowed. They are not yet given the authority to make communal decisions, but they can sit in meetings. Only after marriage do young people become full members of the community, although nowadays there is some bending of this rule.

#### **4.4.2.3 Marriage and house-entering songs: *tyēēnwookikaab kēēsyēet* (known better as *Sōōsyoo*)**

Traditional courtship patterns, brideprice expectations and the marriage ceremony make an extensive anthropological study in themselves,⁴¹ but traditional weddings are becoming a rare event amongst the Sabaot as most couples now opt for a church setting or else elope to avoid the expense.

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³⁹ See Glossary.

⁴⁰ More is said on this instrument in chapter 3.3.4.

⁴¹ A brief description of the marriage ceremony is given in Appendix V.

In the traditional event, the atmosphere is one of celebration and social bonding, and there is much singing. Greetings are sung when the two families gather, followed by clan songs relating to the groom's family and many general entertainment songs.⁴² The atmosphere is not unlike circumcision celebrations.

No traditional wedding is complete, however, unless the *sōōsyoo* song-set is performed. These four songs are the heart of the occasion and the solo parts are supposed to be sung by women, although this is not mandatory as some of my recorded material shows.⁴³ The *sōōsyoo* occur after the groom's family party has arrived at the bride's home, and each song contains references to a number of symbolic items that the bride must carry with her throughout this day.

Again a *bukantiit* is never used with these songs, but *bucheencheyinēk* or *ntēēkwēyiinēk* are worn by women whilst dancing. A typical rhythm consists of a regular pulse with subdivisions:⁴⁴

Pulse of vocal line (MM: x = 96)	x    x    x    x
<i>Ntēēkwēyiinēk</i> rhythm:	x x x x x x x

There is some uncertainty as to the order of the *sōōsyoo* song-set, and although many older women insist the songs must be linked and sung in the correct order, there is no longer any clear consensus what that order should be. The four songs are as follows:

(i) *Sōōsyoo kimiirēy*

This refers directly to the items which the bride has been given during the wedding to help her become a good wife. The first is a stick with a curved end that is designed for cleaning around the angles of gourds. Second is a frond from the *sōōsyooontēēt* palm, for which the song is named. This is inserted into a gourd filled with sour milk and signifies that the girl is released and blessed by her parents. The bride carries the gourd and stick, together with a bowl of maize meal on her back during the ceremony, (the verb *miir* in *kimiirēy* means 'to carry'). Afterwards she takes them to her new home where she may exchange them for a present from the groom's family such as a goat.

⁴² More is said on these in other sections of this typology.

⁴³ Recordings include 41A:162ff. (included in Appendix II and CD:9) and 44B:2ff. A third version (47A:134-277) has the order of songs as i, iv, ii, iii. In the first and third versions above, the solo parts are sung by men.

⁴⁴ As in *Sēērēerwo*, song 40A:250-277.

(ii) *Yāālēy kwoolēy ng'oo*

This song praises the bride who is expected to soon become pregnant. "Who buys a human being? This woman is very costly and important". The 'buying' refers to *koonēywēēk* or exchanging a woman for a brideprice.

(iii) *Sēērēērwo*

This is a song about the leaves of the *ānkuurwēēt* plant, commonly used as a toiletry by the "urinator" and referred to many times in the song. It implies the mother is the carer of her offspring to come.

*Kēēmāchē acheek sēērēērweēnyoo, kaacham āsubēēn ēē.*

We want our broom, I love the gift of friendship of 'subeen'.⁴⁵

(iv) *Buukwo*

The meaning of this song is uncertain. A few say *buukwo* is a river in the Sebei area, "the water of which is sweetness and blesses us", but the majority say it means a broom made from *buukwēēt* branches, symbolising that a good wife is expected to keep the family house clean at all times. The text is disjointed and full of hidden meanings:⁴⁶

*Buukwo, anii nyoo ēē*

Buukwo, it is me, yes

*buukwo abooye, maaka bēy.*

buukwo I come from the place where the water is sticky [icy, ie. high on the mountain].

*Kyoo koroor, buukwo,*

When I arrive home, buukwo,

*cheebnyoo kaa, aay buukwo,*

I am the first one in the home, yes, *buukwo,*

*buukwo, murēnik aay, arum ēē.*

buukwo, men, yes, let me perish, yes,

*a soom lēkēy, wōōy yaaya buukwo,*

ask for a belt, oh dear sister, buukwo,

*buukwo nyoo.*

our buukwo.

*Sābāwōōt, ēē, cheebnyoo kaa*

Oh Sabaot people, yes, who come home first

*ābooyē Tēērēēm kaa,*

I come from the home of Terem,

*aay Tēērēēm kaa, anii nyoo ēē, Kimutaay, ēē, buukwo,*

yes, Terem's home, I am the one called Kimutaay, yes, buukwo

⁴⁵ Referring to the exchange of a young female sheep during this ceremony.

⁴⁶ Edited song text (many vocables and repetitions removed) of 41A:231-264. See Appendix II.

*wookyoo koroori aa, keeng'alaal, ēē,*  
 there they are laughing, yes, let us discuss, yes,  
*sarameek, ēē wōy, yēnēēt, ēē, kooyēnēēt, kanyaa kiiyēn,*  
 the twins, yes, let us reply in chorus, let us respond,  
*buukwēē nyoo, ōōy yaaya, buukwo.*  
 That is our buukwo, oh dear sister, buukwo.

In a secondary role, the four *sōōsyoo* songs are also sung the first time a mother-in-law or father-in-law wishes to enter the house of a family whose first-born child (mostly the first-born girl) has not yet been circumcised. Such an event is planned in advance, with special people chosen to sprinkle milk (now replaced by *mayyeek*) on the visitors outside the house, after which the songs are sung.

This house-entering ceremony is seldom adhered to nowadays, although Kisinja can remember singing these songs for his mother-in-law, which means on such occasions it is acceptable for a man to sing the solo parts. In essence, the use of *sōōsyoo* for such occasions provides an opportunity for familiarising listeners with these songs for a subsequent marriage event.

#### **4.4.2.4 Birth songs (twins): *tyēēntaab sarameek***

The birth of any child is a time of joy amongst the Sabaot, but there are three special categories of birth that are marked by special ceremonies. The first is twins (*sarameek*), the second is if a baby emerges feet first or breech, and the last is a child born after twins (who will be called *kisa*). All such children are highly venerated amongst the Sabaot, and protecting them is considered a high priority. They wear special jewellery as protection against evil spirits and often have a hole pierced in their ears to mark them out from others. There are a number of procedures that must be followed in order to ensure subsequent blessing from the ancestral spirits, and most of these take place at the time of the purification ritual.

##### *(i) Confinement after birth*

After any birth, both the mother and midwife are considered unclean for a period of several days until a special washing takes place. The mother is then confined to her husband's house for a month or more (except for essential forays), and forbidden to see her husband or interact with anyone except her children or a female person who is nominated as a close friend. In former days, the father was also confined, but now he is allowed freedom to move about the community. However, he is still considered



unclean for a period of time, unable to shake hands with anyone or cross any river in case he taints the water.

(ii) *Post-birth purification ritual of twins - neembeyit*

When the mother emerges from her time of isolation, a cleansing or purification ceremony is held, usually coinciding with a moon. This 'coming out' of the mother is an important social event for family and local friends at which food and drink are served and gifts given. First a hole known as *tokomta* is dug near the door of the parents' house, and filled with water. Then a pregnant sheep is suffocated and swung in the air to kill the embryo. The mother kneels in front of the hole, eats a grub that is taken from animal dung, and then drinks the sheep's amniotic fluid four times from her cupped hands. The sheep's embryo is placed in the hole together with the remaining amniotic fluid, and the parents and ceremonial leader take turns to dance on top of it whilst singing a special song.⁴⁷

The only instruments allowed to accompany songs during this entire ceremony are the small traditional *neembeyit* drum made for the occasion by a Sabaot elder, together with either *bucheencheyinēk* or *ntēkwēyiinēk* (ankle shakers). The ceremony itself is named after the *neembeyit*, and it is believed that if the evil spirits which accompany the twins at birth are not chased away by the beating of this drum, the children will die. Spirits only move about in the early morning and evening, so it is these times when this ceremony is held.

During the singing, a young woman will engage in a mock battle whilst carrying a shield and spear to symbolise protecting the twins from evil spirits.⁴⁸ Afterwards, the parents eat and drink with close friends and the heads of the twins are shaved. The mother is anointed with fat and given a bracelet of hide to wear, symbolising she is now free to rejoin the community.

The women visitors then parade around the village, singing a set of four songs known as *tyēēntaab saramEEK* (lit. 'twins songs'). These signify the joy of the occasion, and often mention the names of the new children. The first three songs are all encouraging the twins to live, for they are small and need persuading. They also announce the ending of the mother's seclusion.

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⁴⁷ Song 38A:116-129, ref. Appendix II, CD:12.

⁴⁸ Ref. Goldschmidt 1976: album III, for illustrations of this ceremony.

- (i) *Tuutu yaaya* ('rise from unconsciousness, come out of your house')⁴⁹
- (ii) *Naamuyaaya* (exact meaning is uncertain)
- (iii) *Sakayaa kōōng'uung' moomo*⁵⁰ (a song asking a female twin child to be prepared to look for her own home eventually)
- (iv) *Ōmēēryēē*. (a song of rejoicing sung when the twins are brought out of the house).

This set of songs may be followed by the *sēēryēēt* song group if time allows, or else by general entertainment songs of mixed themes and participation.

#### 4.4.2.5 Life-cycle rituals in which song is optional

##### *The naming of a first-born child or twins*

With the exception of first-born children and twins, naming ceremonies are optional and often modest affairs. If held, it is likely that only an officiating elder and immediate family including grandparents and parents will be present. People generally remain quiet during the name-choosing section of the event, and singing will only happen if there is a family celebration and drinking time afterwards. There are no traditional songs directly linked to child-naming, but sometimes the four *chōōlyēēt* songs may precede a group of general celebratory songs that express happiness and praise for the child or children concerned.

When a Sabaot child is born, the father's first question is to determine gender: "Does this child belong to the indoor or outdoor category?" This is an example of cultural stereotyping deriving from the expectation that girls will spend more time inside than outside the home. A sequence of names will then be given to the child, as a person is referred to in many ways during their lifetime depending on age, personal preference and context.

The names of boys are prefixed by the masculine marker *Kip-* (meaning 'son of'), and girls by the feminine marker *Chep-* (meaning 'daughter of'). Children are not allowed to refer to a man by his *Kip-* name, and later in life, men of the same age-set will also not use the *Kip-* prefix but a variety of nicknames instead. A man's wife will refer to her spouse by a different nickname from all his other names.

⁴⁹ Song 44B:59-175, ref. Appendix II, CD:14.

⁵⁰ Song 44B:151-175, Appendix II, CD:15. This song is also known by the Bukusu title, *Mukarama Sakayaa, kōōng'ung'*.

One of the names given to a child is likely to refer to the time or place of birth, or perhaps an unusual happening such as drought or the visit of a prominent political leader to the area. Twins have pre-assigned names: the first to emerge is called *Cheebkeech*, and the second *Chēēsiro*. A child born after twins is automatically given the name *Kisa*. In addition all children are given the father's family name, and then perhaps a Christian name as encouraged by churches, a nickname, and an ancestral name. The latter is particularly important if a child cries much as this indicates it is troubled by evil spirits.

It is in choosing the ancestral name that a ceremony is involved. Ancestors are seen as a source of problems, and the Sabaot take care to choose names of only those who were considered good people during their lifetime. There are some variants as to how this ceremony is conducted, but most take place a few weeks within birth. A circle of cow dung is made on the ground, and a gourd laid within it. On top of the gourd is balanced a seedpod filled with milk. A woman who has had twins or is herself a twin then calls the names of each family member (clan ancestor) who has died. If the child is a girl, only the names of deceased women of that family are called, and vice versa for a boy. As the name of each clan ancestor is invoked, the elder asks, "Are you the one bothering this child?" and pours a libation of milk around the circle. Should the seedpod suddenly topple, they will say "This relative is not coming". If it continues to balance while the same name is invoked more than once, the elder will decide the child should be named after the spirit which has manifested itself in this way.⁵¹ Once chosen, the ancestral name is seldom referred to again after the ceremony lest the dead person be offended in some way.

#### **4.4.3 Non-ritual use of song**

##### **4.4.3.1 Warrior songs: *tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt***

*Tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt* means 'the battle songs of warriors'. In the past when these were sung to mark actual events, no musical instruments were used as warriors carried only spears in their hands. Nowadays cattle raids are forbidden by the government, hence the role of warrior songs is now for entertainment rather than

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⁵¹ Amongst the Kipsigiis, ancestral names are called out until the baby sneezes or makes some noise, this indicating the name which must be chosen.

practical evoking of courage, and it is acceptable to include instruments such as the *bukantiit*. This concession applies only to solo narrative songs, however, as group songs require thrusting arm actions from the men that make instrumental playing impractical. The actions are timed to coincide with the pulses of the song.

Within this general category of warrior songs there are at least three sub-categories: those aimed at preparing warriors psychologically for battle or cattle raids; those praising successful fighters and welcoming them safely home; and those history songs lauding famous achievements by particular warriors.

(i) *Tyēēnwookikaab seeteet* ('songs that prepare raiders'; *seet* means 'raid')

Retrieving stolen cattle required a swift response from Sabaot warriors and left little time to prepare or sing beforehand, but when long-distance raids were pre-planned, songs were combined with a blessing-rite. Call and response in structure, these are sung by men alone, although women gather to add ululations. The songs either exhort the warriors to bravery or remind them of strategy: "we should go to the north where our cattle were taken".⁵²

(ii) *Wōōrintō* ('victory songs', a varied category of content and styles)

These mark the return of warriors from a successful cattle raid,⁵³ and are again call and response in structure. There are conflicting descriptions of who sung these songs, with some Sabaot saying that women never sang together with the warriors, but instead had their own celebratory songs known as *yēēbwo* (victory dances) for when they knew the warriors were returning to the villages.

Others recount that when the warriors returned to their villages they would sing first, and the women would reciprocate with a sung welcome whilst dipping leaves into gourds filled with milk and shaking these over the men. The milk symbolised the cows that the men had brought with them, but there could also be teasing and mocking of the attributes of their warrior husbands.

There are many *wōōrintō* songs that commemorate actions of famous warriors, one popular example being Kimoru, who led a battle in which Pokot and

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⁵² For example, song 47A:63-89, Appendix II, CD:17. Another example is 40B:355-409, referring to a place called Namaaluk.

⁵³ As in song 41A:19-72, CD:16.

Sabaot forces joined together.⁵⁴ It would seem more sensible to put these songs into the *Mānyirōōr* sub-category that follows, but the Sabaot insist that Kimoru comes under the *wōōrintō* category and should not have *bukantiit*.

(iii) *Mānyirōōr*

This song category is standard repertoire for master players such as Kisinja and Kinyokye, although it is not necessarily restricted to men. The songs are always solo narratives without responses, and supported by *kiiraanchiinek* and *chuukaasiit* if these are available.⁵⁵

Set in the early 1900's during the *Samaynēn* age-set (circa 1892-1907), the song recounts the journey of some one hundred Sabaot warriors to Chebukat (Wakisu area in Uganda). Their aim was to retrieve stolen cattle, and the warriors were led by a much revered fighter called *Mānyirōōr*, who was reputed to be the first Sabaot to own a gun. A *Wōōrkooyoontēēt* warned *Mānyirōōr* not to drink stagnant water enroute, to turn back if he saw a white dog, to avoid the lowlands and not to kill anyone on the way. All warnings were ignored and all were killed, including *Mānyirōōr*.⁵⁶ This painful event is now immortalised a song that contains a strong message on obedience, overconfidence and pride.

#### 4.4.3.2 Work songs: *tyēēnwookikaab yiisyēēt*

These can be sung by men and women during any manual work that requires repetitive rhythmic movements such as ploughing, digging fields or grinding millet. Solitary workers in particular, sing to encourage themselves and their animals.

The singer may add onomatopoeic effects imitating the snorting of oxen pulling the plough, and phrases within the song can be interspersed by whistling or shouts to the animals.⁵⁷ The songs are never accompanied by any instrument, with the exception of the *kuurēruut* flute that is sometimes played by herdsboys.

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⁵⁴ Song 48B:03-56.

⁵⁵ Examples are song 40A:2-245 (Kisinja, Appendix II, CD:18) and 41B:192-245 (Kinyokye, CD:20). See chapter 5.3 for a description of the *chuukaasiit*.

⁵⁶ As told by Kisinja.

⁵⁷ Ref. CD:21 for plough song 43A:1-54 (also Appendix II).



#### 4.4.3.3 Lullabies: *tyēēnto nyēē /kēēsooysooyēē keekwēēt*

These are called 'songs for comforting a baby', as there is no specific word for 'lullaby' in the Sabaot language. The words of lullabies often contain phrases such as:

*Ōrēērōō, ōō, ōō, ruchi keey, ōō, ōō.*

Oh dear, oh, oh, just-sleep, oh, oh.

*Kuchō:moomo, ōō, ōō, kusut chuuchu, ōō, ōō* (sung repeatedly).

Mother will come, oh, oh, with the teats, oh, oh.⁵⁸

The Sabaot are very caring of all children, and there is no gender restriction as to who sings lullabies. Men are just as likely as women to pick up a child and sing to it, although they leave the carrying of babies to the mother. All the lullabies recorded for this study are solo voice without instrumental accompaniment. They are also remarkable for their choice of intervals, and this will be examined further in chapter eight.

#### 4.4.3.4 Young (uninitiated) people's songs: *tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk*

When discussing song types with the Sabaot, many seemed baffled as to why I should enquire about children's songs. I was told they were not important, just fun games that kept the children amused. However, such songs take a child through several phases, the first of which is linked with education. Prior to the arrival of schools on Mount Elgon, children received tutelage from their grandparents and songs were an important part of this process.

As in many parts of Kenya, the age at which a child begins primary education depends on many factors, and there can be a wide mix of ages in the first year. Some children never go to school and instead learn what they can from listening to songs of more fortunate children. These monodic songs are usually led by one child until others join in, and often include shouts and actions. They may have been taught by teachers or invented by the children themselves. One that is known by many is called *chōōrēy*,⁵⁹ (taken from *choor*, meaning 'to steal'), being a playful song about a girl and boy who tease each other about marriage, wondering who they will steal as a partner. Other songs are based on counting, ridicule,⁶⁰ word plays (riddles) or moral

⁵⁸ From song 41B:278-299, Appendix II, CD:22.

⁵⁹ Song 41B:271-278, Appendix II, CD:25.

⁶⁰ As in song 41B:268-271, Appendix II, CD:24.

tales. The name the Sabaot give to this overall category of song (*tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk*) is the same as for circumcision songs, as both focus on children.

Highland Sabaot children begin learning the mainstream ceremonial songs through watching and imitating other singers, both in the home and at social gatherings. When pre-circumcision groups of youths travel from village to village, young children will trot along in their wake copying both the songs and the actions, and youngsters are likely to be pushed to the front of a watching crowd when a ceremonial event takes place. Some Christian parents will now keep their children away from such influences, resulting in a generation that has had little or no exposure to ceremonial songs. Instead, these children are more likely to gain their knowledge of song from listening to the family radio or nearby church groups.

#### **4.4.3.5 Songs of the past (history, *aroosyek* and creation)**

Before looking at this large group of songs, it is important to note that definitive classification is almost impossible in any Sabaot song that covers chronological events. If a song starts with a situation that is no longer remembered by those present, the subject matter will inevitably move on to more recent events such as deeds of heroism, political ramifications or moralistic affirmations, usually presented in an entertaining manner. Many of the defining boundaries are now intermingled, and a song that at first seems to be a historical account often closes in the present.⁶¹

A repeat performance of the same song may have different foci emerging from the text depending on the circumstances in which it is sung.

##### *(i) Historical, topical and political songs*

Songs are the prime carriers of historical events and incidents of lasting interest amongst the Sabaot. There are many narrative songs recording events that have impacted the history of the Sabaot people, ranging from accounts of famous battles to the coming of independence. Well-known songs include *chōōliim*,⁶² which tells of three sisters in the Trans Nzoia area who had hoped to get married but the local people spread evil rumours about them. Their father, a *Wōōrkooyoontēēt*, was

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⁶¹ This also explains why the author's name (*Tewerer*) is included in many of the recorded songs.

⁶² Song 47B:91-176.

saddened when he heard such things, and announced that those who were responsible for such lies would die, causing the people to disperse in fear.

Another such song is *mbisyoontēēt* (*Kubsābiiny* word for natural salt),⁶³ about the lack of peace during Idi Amin's reign in Uganda when fighting halted essential industries such as salt production. The song tells of a man in Uganda who ate a cockerel that was cooked without salt and therefore "not sweet", and it contrasts Kenya as having been blessed by God with both salt and good leaders.

More recent topics include land struggles, a subject close to the Sabaot people's hearts, and the formation of the new Mount Elgon District. All of these songs are included under 'traditional' classification due to their style and manner of performance, but they are very much a topical political commentary operating in lieu of newspapers or formal records of issues important to the Sabaot people. Whenever the President or some other important dignitary visits the Sabaot area a flurry of songs invariably result. There are also many songs on more topical issues that are thinly veiled expressions of social discontent, such as a song about the Kenya Wildlife Service failing to control animals from destroying local crops.⁶⁴

Almost all of these songs are solo narratives accompanied by *bukantiit* and either *kiiraanchiinek* or *bucheencheyinēk*, but an exception is a song known as *chebaabaa*.⁶⁵ This recounts the struggles when the colonial government moved people down from the Mount Elgon highlands, and is considered to be a mourning song of such sadness that it is inappropriate to be accompanied by an instrument such as the *bukantiit* that is more associated with joy. However, it is interesting that ululations are acceptable in such a song, here signifying agreement and intensity. As one woman explained, sad songs reveal the true fibre of the Sabaot people: "No matter how sad the message, a song is always positive in some way".⁶⁶

#### (ii) *Aroosyek (clan) songs*

Clans are very important to Sabaot social lineage and songs are the primary means used by the Sabaot of passing down historical accounts to younger generations. Some

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⁶³ I was unable to obtain a recording of this song.

⁶⁴ Song 40B:73-161.

⁶⁵ Song 47B:248-288, CD:26.

⁶⁶ Maria Maiba Masai, Saboti workshop November 1999.

of these songs are considered to 'belong' to various clans, thus are only allowed to be sung by members of the clan referred to. All *aroosyek* songs relate events that have happened in the lives of various well-known clan members.⁶⁷

The actions of *Wōōrkooyik* feature more than most in these songs. Kisinja has some eight clan songs in his repertoire which include mention of Chong'e, Mwesyek, Cheptek and Song'oywo, all *Wōōrkooyik* of the lower *Sōōy* area. Some *aroosyek* songs date back to the late 1920s, recording the time of the Carter Land Commission in Trans-Nzoia. Toweett (1979:2) reports that the folksongs and poems of the neighbouring Kipsigis are short-lived, and that songs commemorating the deeds of great men fade from the song repertoire soon after their death. There is no supporting evidence for this happening with Sabaot commemoration or clan songs.

### (iii) *Creation songs*

There is at least one melody described as a "legend about the mountain and God's creation", but as with many other traditional songs, the author is unknown and the song belongs to the community.⁶⁸ It was recorded during a song composition workshop in Kobsiir, but with a Scripture text substituted for the original message. The text (Matthew 7:7-8) has no link with the subject of creation, so it is uncertain why such a song was chosen as the vehicle. There is also some doubt amongst Sabaot musicians as to whether there are sufficient examples of creation songs to merit categorisation.

#### 4.4.3.6 **Entertainment songs:** *tyēēnwookikaab ng'asyaneet*

Communal occasions are important times of bonding amongst the Sabaot and are considered incomplete without food, drink and singing. Traditional ceremonies provide the main reason for such celebrations, and even though such events are

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⁶⁷ Such as song 40A:294-340 called /*Kikeekwey kōōnōōtōōwoo* meaning 'chosen leader', ref. Appendix II and CD:27. It is the tale of a man called Kibng'weeng'wa whose brother Cheesaambuut had no cows. Kibng'weeng'wa gave Cheesaambuut a small calf but his brother was dissatisfied, returned to his brother's grazing land, cheated a small herdschild and stole a large cow. Kibng'weeng'wa became angry, fetched his spear and followed his thieving brother. Cheesaambuut had hidden the stolen cow on clan land, but when an observer reported this to Kibng'weeng'wa, the latter reacted by spearing the innocent informant in his fury. The moral of this is that stealing is very bad, and everyone should be satisfied with whatever they have been given.

⁶⁸ Song 30A:184-224.

decreasing in number, less formal gatherings continue in various homesteads. The Sabaot recognise the increasing pressures of diversification and fragmentation that face them as a people group, but even though family members now move further afield in search of land and work, they will return whenever possible for communal events.

A rite-of-passage may be a serious occasion, but any song-making is likely to be a mixture of serious and informal. The formal songs must come first, but after that the choice broadens into a large group of traditional songs all of which are described as 'entertainment' by the Sabaot. Post-circumcision events are good examples of this, with singing continuing long into the night and sustained by a liberal supply of *mayyeek*.

Topics range from humorous accounts of past candidates who disgraced their families by either crying or running away from the knife, to praise songs about the family and clan members hosting the evening. There will be some commonality of theme linking all the songs, but soloists are free to develop their thoughts in any way that they choose. A good singer will always seek to reinforce relationships by judicious recognition of appropriate people. They will also be aware that, no matter how many distractions may be taking place, none of their listeners will relegate a song to background commentary but will be evaluating every word.

Another occasion for entertainment songs is when people seek to express happiness and satisfaction with life in general. Events such as a good crop season are marked by non-specific songs,⁶⁹ but as harvesting is considered a woman's role, it is not unusual for women's songs such as *ntēkwēyiiṭ*⁷⁰ to feature during any drinking times afterwards.

Entertainment songs vary in structure from lengthy solo narratives to call and response songs that involve the voice of everyone present. Much depends on whether there is a singer/player present who knows the narratives and can play the *bukantiit* well, as this style requires considerable performance skills. Certain themes are more popular than others:

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⁶⁹ But see section 4.4.4 under 'sacrifices'.

⁷⁰ See earlier mention under *mēliiṭo* ceremony, section 4.4.2.2.



*(i) Cattle*

There is no specific genre of cattle songs, but cattle are still considered highly important to the Sabaot despite the reduction in pastoral livelihoods. Hence descriptions of cattle are included in many of the song categories, with Sabaot men often knowing by name every animal that they and their immediate neighbours own. Cattle are praised for their strength, milk-giving capacity, colour, and even the shape of their horns. The men also sing of days when the Sabaot herds roamed across the moorlands, and may add various animal calls or whistling noises to a song to increase the entertainment level.

*(ii) Satire and morality*

Although the Sabaot will sing satirical songs during times of entertainment, these are a means of social commentary that are taken very seriously. It is more acceptable to ridicule a person openly in song along with attempts to rebuke or correct them, than it is to address that person verbally. Goldschmidt (1976:303) concludes that the Sebei indulge in little or no moralisation, but it is more likely the case that they prefer to use the medium of song for such matters.

Satire and morality often go hand in hand, as shown in the following song about the selfishness of a certain woman who is deliberately not named in the song although everyone recognises who she is:⁷¹

An old man comes home from work, and asks his wife to prepare some food.

"I have no flour".

"Give me milk then", says the man.

"I have none, the cow kicked me".

"Give me eggs then".

"I have no eggs, the chicken is still sitting on them".

"Tomorrow we will both go and weed the field to grow some food".

"Oh, I can't possibly go, I'm sick".

The man rents a car and takes her to hospital. When she sees the injection, she says: "I'm feeling fine now, I'm healed", so they return home. Then the wife's sister comes to visit, and says to the wife

"How are you? Alright?"

"Yes, I couldn't be better".

The wife tells her daughter to run and catch a chicken so they can kill it and prepare it for the sister's meal. The daughter does so, but then the wife cooks and eats it all! How selfish!

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⁷¹ Song 1A:154-204, sung by Kisinja. English story line provided by Stanley Ndiema.

Other popular moral themes include jealousy and stealing.⁷² As would be expected with songs having such a high text load, many of these are solo narratives with instrumental accompaniment.

#### 4.4.4 Other traditional practices

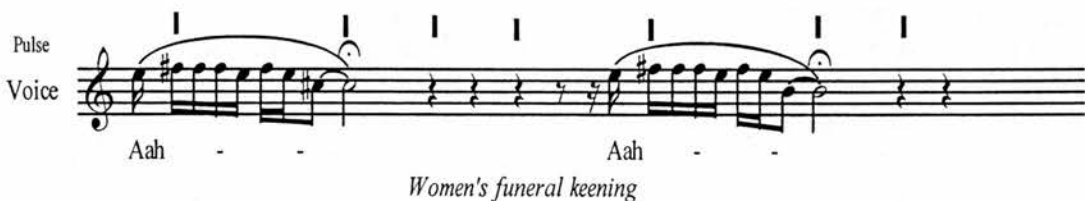
This section contains reference to a few of the other rituals practised by the Sabaot, in which I am told the role of music is entirely absent or negligible. Reasons are given where known, but it is possible that denial of song use is occurring due to the conflicts between traditional and Christian belief systems.

##### (i) Oathing, divination and witchcraft

These are powerful rites and treated with utmost seriousness, respect and fear amongst the Sabaot. For this reason, songs are never sung on such occasions, unless there is a subsequent cause for celebration over a providential outcome.

##### (ii) Burials

In traditional burials, close relatives are responsible for washing the *muusyoontēēt* (body of the deceased) and conducting various rituals against witchcraft. As people gather at the burial site near to the house of the first wife, the women of the bereaved household rush around outside grieving. Flailing their arms towards the ground, they make intermittent high-pitched cries consisting of vocables or rapidly chanted phrases that are repeated many times over:



⁷² The theme of the /Kikeekwey kōōnōōtōōwōo clan song mentioned earlier (40A:294-340).

Traditionally all other music is considered inappropriate at burials, owing to the inordinate fear of death that characterises both Sebei and Sabaot.⁷³ The churches are now encouraging the singing of hymns, but at the time of writing this, it is evident that acceptance of this is ambivalent on the higher slopes of Mount Elgon. Many older people stand silent and uncomfortable whilst a pastor leads some unaccompanied singing. Only those who reach a venerated age are accorded a less anguished send-off, with perhaps a small feeding celebration for close relatives shortly afterwards. The more common pattern is for mourners to quietly leave soon after the body is interred, following which the immediate family observes three days of rest (*mākurwēt*).

(iii) *God and ancestor worship*

References to *Yēyiintēt* occur in recent songs owing to church influence, but strangely there is no evidence of any worship song addressed directly to or giving attributes of the ancient high god *Asiis*. I suspect this is simply because the name of *Yēyiintēt* has supplanted the earlier titles, but this change has happened during the lifetime of many singers still alive so it is significant that they cannot recall songs mentioning *Asiis*. The Sabaot did, however, believe that such a being would bring them blessings, and included petitions to him in warrior and first-born songs, and also in sacrificial rituals.

The Sabaot have always differentiated between a being who lives in 'the heavens above' and ancestors who live beneath the earth. The latter are represented above ground by *āyiikaab kōōng'woong'* (ancestral spirits) who can be either favourable or bad.⁷⁴ Ancestors are never mentioned in songs as the possibility of offending them is considered too great.

(iv) *Tooth removal*

A number of minor traditional practices such as the extraction of a lower incisor tooth or the piercing of ears to prepare young candidates for the pain of the

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⁷³ Ref. Goldschmidt, 1976:338, and Edgerton, 1971:119.

⁷⁴ See further comments in chapter 2.10.

circumcision rite now rarely take place. Neither do songs feature in these except when twins are involved, at which time a few songs may be sung to bless them.

(v) *Rain / seasons*

There are no thanksgiving songs for rain or seasonal changes, but some musicians such as Kinyokye and Kisinja have heard of an end-of-year song event praising the new moon. No-one has been able to give any information on this, and respected elders such as Andrea Ndiwa and Joseph Kimountai Kirui feel the cycle of seasons and moon to have no influence on music or instrument use. It would seem that both the Sebei⁷⁵ and the Sabaot make no particular acknowledgement of the moon other than believing that ceremonies should not be held when it is hidden by cloud as this provides cover for evil spirits.

If the rains are late in coming, an event may occur which has some similarities to the cleansing ceremony held after the birth of twins. It involves digging a *tokomta* and stepping on the embryo of a freshly killed ewe, but depending on the seriousness of the occasion, this is more likely to be linked with incantations than songs.

(vi) *Sacrifices*

These are increasingly rare, but according to Kororio, there are still occasions when they might be considered necessary. Those held on less stressful occasions may have accompanying songs, such as one called *kiyaang'ta* (meaning 'song of the bow') which was sung during sacrifices to determine a good time for planting. Kororio remembers the existence of this song, but neither the melody nor words, hence I have no recorded example as yet.

A sacrifice known as *kōrōsyōōntēēt* is sometimes held when crops are nearing harvest or honeycombs are ready for collecting. The elders gather beforehand and mix the leaves of *teekaanteet* (bamboo) together with shavings of a hardwood tree and pieces of honeycomb, burning this mixture in the fire as an offering to *Asiis*. They may also slaughter a sheep and study the intestines for propitious signs. When there is a breakout of disease amongst people or animals, the

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⁷⁵ Ref. Goldschmidt 1976:303.

elders will consult with a *Wōōrkooyoontēēt* and sacrifice either a sheep or cow. Again no songs are sung owing to the presence of the *Wōōrkooyoontēēt*.

(vii) *Hunting*

Hunting exploits are mentioned in various entertainment songs sung today, and the Sabaot greatly enjoy hearing animal sounds being imitated in song. Game animals have been protected since 1977, and although some have claimed that songs were sung in the forest by *Mosoobiisyēk* hunters after a successful killing, I have found no-one who can remember any of these. Elders such as Ndiwa and Kirui have told me they would shout when they made a successful kill, but the songs came later during a community drinking celebration. With moorland life so firmly and proudly etched in the minds of many, it is highly unlikely that such forest songs would have entirely vanished, if indeed a specific category ever existed.





*Iloombuuchē :siimootwēēt keetiikchuut.*

The *simotweet* tree overlaps other trees.

(Larger things overpower smaller ones).

Sabaot proverb

### 5.1 Choices in the East African contemporary music scene

Considerable scholarly attention has focused upon the various contemporary/popular styles to impact Kenya,¹ unlike the traditional Sabaot music that is foregrounded in this thesis. Hence I do not aim to discuss non-traditional styles in any detail (the exception being church music which is covered in chapter 8.2) as here I am concerned with changes in musical systems and the decision-making processes these precipitate. It is also important to show the extent to which these musical systems are distinct enough to constitute 'choice' in Sabaot perception, and how national and local perspectives on music use differ.

Every music system in Africa stands upon a foundation of evolving traditional cultures that existed long before music from Asia and the West ever reached its shores. The subsequent colonising legacy of Europe impacted the musical history of the African continent by deciding to exclude much of traditional music from institutions such as churches and educational systems. Nketia (1992:16-17) suggests the result of this filtering was that subsequent musical creativity divided in two directions: popular music and church music. However, the more traditional elements remain a subdued but viable third option, much the same as African traditional religious beliefs still form the essential background to Christianity and other religions.² Confusion and doubt exist for many Africans today as to how to acknowledge traditional music, none more so than in the fast-developing country of Kenya.

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¹ Authors include Barber (1987), Bender (1991), Broughton (1994), Ewens (1991), Fargion (1999), Graham (1988), Kavyū (1998), Kebede (1982), and Wallis/Malm (1984).

² Mbiti, 1969:xi.

### 5.1.1 Popular music in Kenya

Popular music can loosely be defined as a new kind of art created by a newly emergent class, the "fluid heterogeneous urban mass" (Barber, 1987:14). Besides the economic basis of such a mass market, this type of music is now highly mediated by broadcast technology and people's access to radios and televisions. The content reflects an increasingly diverse market incorporating a hybrid of musical elements from global cultures.

Popular music views itself as a voice free from the restrictions of officialdom, although there are limits in political terms to how far this goes in Kenya. It is more the case that boundaries of acceptable content are constantly extending and retreating, a testing-ground for activist opinion. Although the sentiments expressed are more likely to be national than global, there are few predictables since each influences the other. Vocabulary is constantly changing and can be deliberately novel or crude, although in this last respect, traditional song texts are equally renowned for sparing no blushes.

Popular music of national perspective has grown from several sources, of which Zairean music in the 1920s proved prominent.³ Deriving from migrant workers of Ghana, Cameroon and Nigeria who converged on mining towns and defined their musical expression in night clubs and dance halls, this genre is best known as 'Congolese' or *highlife*. Its wide circulation in sub-Saharan Africa was greatly assisted by the promotions of Radio Brazzaville during the Second World War.

A second source of popular music emanated from the coastal area of Mombasa, a thriving seaport where the advent of gramophones amongst the more affluent dock-workers and Indian traders of the 1930s opened the door to many new influences. Migrants carried these new music styles inland, in the words of Kavyû (1998:626), to 'marry' into both the traditional and educational music domains. Dance club bands known as *danzi* or *beni ngoma* introduced instruments such as the accordion, harmonica, guitar and string bass, but the military in Kenya were another source of instruments, enabling trumpets, cornets, bugles and flutes to cross into brass-band jazz or *brasso*.

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³ Formerly Belgian Congo, now Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the 1940s, numerous exponents of Afro-Cuban *rumba*,⁴ the 'new world' fusion of Latin and African idioms, were emanating from Kinshasa, the centre of music-making at that time. They came to Nairobi seeking contracts and fortune in an opportunistic market, and Kenya's home-grown musicians struggled to earn a livelihood until their own *benga* dance music became popular in the 1960s. Drawing heavily on both Kikuyu sage philosophy and the Luo traditions of western Kenya, *benga* awoke stirrings of national consciousness by combining traditional dance rhythms, guitars, and traditional lyres such as the *nyatiti*. Guitar lines were high-pitched, whilst chorus sections used upper-register falsetto voices and lively bass lines.

Whereas Zairean dance music and South African *kwela* (the latter known as 'twist' or penny whistle music) were often fast in tempo from the start, *benga* saved its liveliest moments until the later part of the song.⁵ It proved immensely successful, even beyond the borders of Kenya, but in the 1980s, the musical focus returned once again to Congolese styles, to *kwela*, and then to *nyasa* from Malawi, which is drawn from South African beats. *Rumba* had made a huge comeback, and was then followed by *soukous*,⁶ a provocative dance style using Lingala lyrics which remains highly popular today amongst many young people in East Africa.

As Kenyan musicians tried to create their own community markets, there was a growing consciousness that national promotion was needed if Kenya was to hold its own against other countries. There was little recording equipment available in Kenya until the mid 1970s, the supply constantly affected by economic factors and limited resources, but one of the first signs of combating this was the formation of a Kenyan company called Equator Records. Although a move in the right direction, it was short-lived. Overwhelmed by the dominance of low budget foreign recording imports of soul, disco and reggae, Equator Records collapsed in the 1970s, but others were soon to follow.

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⁴ Pioneered by guitarist Antoine Wendo who, in 1948, was the first Congolese to cut a disc (*Daily Nation*, January 24, 1999).

⁵ Exponents include Colléla Mazee, Ochieng Nelly, Shirati Jazz and Joseph Kamaru.

⁶ Artistes such as Kanda Bongo Man.

Kenyan night clubs began to encourage national variants of *benga* such as *dholuo* from Lake Victoria region.⁷ *Kikuyu pop* also rose at this time from Kenya's largest ethnic group of Central Province and Nairobi, merging Kikuyu lyrics and traditional melodies with *benga*, country and western, reggae and *soukous*.⁸ The Kamba people southeast of Nairobi then responded with *Kamba pop* or 'merry-go-round' style, so called owing to its use of low range guitar chords beneath a second guitar on fast fill-in patterns.

Rapid developments were also being made in the amplification of electric instruments and the introduction of keyboards and drum machines: "People today are no longer interested in using the traditional instruments. The drum machine is more perfect.... purer".⁹ However, the cost of equipment and instruments remains beyond the reach of most Kenyan musicians, which does not appease their sense of frustration and bitterness. The dance music industry has the potential to be one of the fastest growing business opportunities in Kenya, but is held back by finances rather than vision.

Between November 2000 to March 2001, I made a brief sample of the night club entertainment in several Kenyan urban centres,¹⁰ including Eldoret, Kitale and Bungoma at the foot of Mount Elgon. In all locations, dance halls and bars were packed out and promoting a similar range of styles. There was Lingala *soukous* dancing led by artistes such as Koffi Olomide, Papa Wemba and Kanda Kid. There was the *chakacha*¹¹ of Princess Farida and Kala Mashaka, as well as numerous exponents of soul, motown, *ndombolo* dance routines (characterised by acrobatic and overtly sexual moves), reggae, hip-hop, slow jam, rap, *omutibo* (Kenyan acoustic guitar style with bottle percussion), *benga* and funk.

There was also *tāarab* from the Arabic word *tārab* meaning 'pleasure, rapture, entertainment or these emotions as evoked by music'.¹² This syncretic style of popular entertainment music is played at weddings and other celebrations along the Swahili-

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⁷ Artistes include Paul Orwa and Daniel Owino Misiani.

⁸ A notable exponent from 1967 was Joseph Kamaru.

⁹ Quote by Mystic Djim in Simon (ed.), *World Music*, 1994:330.

¹⁰ Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Bungoma and Kitale.

¹¹ A women's Swahili wedding dance loosely derived from *tāarab*.

¹² *NGDMM*, 24:901. Spelling variants include *tarabu*, *taarabu*, *tariba* and *tarab*.



speaking coastline, and contains Egyptian, Indian, Arabic and western influences combined with local musical practices. *Tāarab* is best described as sung poetry, as it uses metaphors and allegories that only those familiar with Swahili poetry can fully understand. Hidden meanings make it a good tool for social criticism, but excellence is judged more by the flow of words and adherence to rules of metre and rhyme than from the actual storyline. It is increasingly popular in sound-tracks of Kenyan-produced Asian films, supporting themes of love, social and political issues.

In the 1930s, the instrumentation of *tāarab* songs was mostly Arabic, including the lute, pottery drum, *gambuz*,¹³ zither, fiddle, *riqq*¹⁴ and rattle. Today *tabla*,¹⁵ electric guitars and organs have joined the rich instrumental line up, symbolising the complex identity of the Swahili heritage and its blending with western pop music. *Tāarab* takes many forms, and ensembles can be women-only (*taarab ya wanawake*, which includes varieties with ribald lyrics such as *chakacha* and *vugo*), small informal groups using more local dance style and percussion (*ngoma za kinyeji*) or larger ensembles. It is a style as much at home in community settings as in dance halls, and its influence is felt in all but the most isolated parts of Kenya today.

Government authorities have tried on several occasions to check the flood of foreign music being performed in Kenya. In March 1980, the Department of Information decided that, "starting immediately, seventy-five percent of all music in regular (English-speaking) programmes must be of Kenyan origin" (Bender, 1991:133), referring to television and radio production of both state and independent control. However, the ensuing public outcry revealed stronger public preferences for Congolese sounds than for the traditional music scene.

"The local music sounds so terrible... I don't understand why they want us to play Kenyan music, which the people don't want to hear".¹⁶

After only two weeks the ministerial directive was withdrawn.

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¹³ Wooden, short-necked lute.

¹⁴ Shallow single-head frame drum, from which hang small metal discs or jingles.

¹⁵ An asymmetrical pair of small, tuned, hand-played drums of North and central India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (*NGDMM*, 24:901).

¹⁶ Quote by disc jockey of 'Voice of Kenya' radio station (Bender 1991:133). See also Wallis and Malm, 1984:145.

A spate of expulsions of foreign musicians lacking work permits then caused a notable decrease in popular band music in Nairobi. This proved only temporary, but in 2000, foreign dance bands were again banned from performing in urban centres such as Kisumu due to complaints that they were monopolising work opportunities over Kenyan artistes. Public demand soon brought them back, and Nairobi is now hosting a number of large public events such as 'Love Jam' and 'Guinness Sunbeat' that draw much of their inspiration from non-Kenyan traditions.¹⁷

Yet, alongside all this, Kenyan musicians and listeners alike are beginning to realise that firstly there is a worldwide market for 'African' sounds, and secondly, their own musical traditions have a communicative value that could be better utilised in the popular music arena. A growing number of musicians are now searching purposefully for a renewed Kenyan musical expression:

"After over a decade of imitating American music, Kenya's youthful urban musicians... are exploring their Africanness, and the result, though still in the experimental stages, shows promise of a bright new music coming out of Kenya".¹⁸

#### 5.1.2 'Traditional mix'

Despite the growing interest in combining traditional styles with the forms and instrumentation of foreign music, such moves are often inspired more by the search for market innovation than a real desire to return to traditional roots. However, the favourable reactions of listeners in Kenya indicates a resurgence in appreciation of certain elements of roots music on a par with innovation. Styles such as *benga*, *tāarab*, *Kikuyu* and *Kamba pop* have greatly risen in popularity, and now constitute the 'traditional mix' of dance halls and music clubs, this being a term that is increasingly used by urban musicians in Kenya.

Kenyan musicians are realising that traditional mix offers a middle ground where they are "free to operate between established cultural systems without conforming to their conventions".¹⁹ One such 'cultural system' that has brought many

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¹⁷ Kenyans were asked to attend 'Love Jam' in 1998 masked in Halloween costumes, whilst the 'Guinness Sunbeat' reggae festival in the same year downplayed Kenyan music in favour of international music styles.

¹⁸ From feature article "The Sounds of '98" by John Kariuki, *Daily Nation*, January 2, 1999.

¹⁹ Barber, 1987:13.

conventions is the African church and its attitudes towards traditional music. More specifically, the fear of associative ties with secular traditions has prevented the use of traditional music in Kenyan churches. However, such discriminations have far less impact in popular music venues where musicians have greater freedom of experimentation.

Aside from the church issue, it might be expected that a country such as Kenya would have at least one indigenous sound that acts as its ambassador on the world stage. However, as already mentioned in chapter 1.2, being home to such a large number of ethnic groups has made it difficult for a national identity to emerge. Most Kenyans have some awareness of the diverse musical traditions of their land, but there seems no possible way for a national government to either co-ordinate these or encourage all on an equal basis. Instead it has fallen to individuals to recognise and develop a market niche for whatever musical tradition they represent.

Kenyan musicians often say that they avoid using their traditional music in urban settings as they fear it will seem a step backwards in a trend-dominated music scene. They are not alone, as musicians from other African countries are facing similar predicaments. Kakraba Lobi, master xylophonist of Ghana, who made his first trip overseas to a conference in Israel in 1963, played only popular *highlife* tunes at that time. He lacked confidence to perform his indigenous Lobi tunes, but revised his attitude when he saw the international enthusiasm for African music.²⁰

Similarly, Paul Osul from the Jopadhola people of Mbale District, Uganda, realised after studying abroad that he needed to record an album that utilised instruments such as the *endongo* lyre and traditional song styles. He aimed to convince his own people that rather than being ashamed of their root music (*asili ya muziki*), they should recognise its wider value in today's world.²¹ Both Lobi and Osul were determined to promote African melodic and rhythmic structures, but were not averse to adding western musical idioms and developmental techniques.

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²⁰ Ref. Djedje and Carter, 1989:100.

²¹ "Going Back to the Roots", by Ogova Ondego, *Daily Nation*, 13th October 2000.

From accusations of an over-reliance on Congolese and western influences,²² the Kenyan secular music scene is now similarly waking up to the marketing potential of ethnic specialisation: "African music is as good as any other if produced and marketed well".²³ Foreign appraisal of the Brussels-based all-female line up 'Zap Mama' has been favourable, whilst 'Jabali Africa' and 'Kayamba Afrika' are two other groups currently experimenting with contemporary realisations of Kenyan folksongs and specifically targeting the 'music export' markets abroad. On the home-scene, the 'Talking Drums of Kenya', 'Taffi Kenya', and 'African Tumbas of Kenya' (a dance troupe formed in 1995 by artistes from various hotel groups who felt they wanted to do more than the stereotyped 'souvenir' dances for tourists) are all deliberately using the word 'Kenya' in their titles so as to identify with their homeland.

These trends may smack of commercialism to some, but they are rooted in an ideology that is awakening favourable responses from African and foreign audiences alike. In the case of the former, this may be the unspoken assuaging of a sense of musical loss and ethnic identity, in the latter, anything with a traditional African flavour is in favour:

"We [West] are looking at African music as a source of new ideas, as an addition to what *we* have, as a style to take parts of, as music to be co-opted under the formulas of the business".²⁴

In Kenyan churches, however, any changes in attitude towards indigenous worship have been considerably slower to emerge. A process known as 'Africanisation' began to develop in the 1960s, overlaying stylised traditional elements such as body movement, clapping, call and response and harmonisation patterns onto existing hymnody. This was further explored in Pan-African music, not a genre as such, but epitomised during sub-Saharan church conferences from the late 1970s. The worship style was a blending of components that could be identified by urban, rural and refugee dwellers alike, thereby fostering a sense of non-regionality and unity.

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²² "They want to do things in an easier way so they copy. The youth of today play music because they want to make money". Quote by Anne-Marie Nzie in Simon (ed.), *World Music*, 1994:332.

²³ Kenyan composer/ producer Dickson Oyaro in "Search for alternative music", *Daily Nation*, 13 October 2000.

²⁴ Bender, 1991: Chernoff introduction p.xii, *italics mine*.

Although a handful of church establishments in Kenya (such as Nairobi Cathedral) have maintained a strong preference for western choral and plainsong styles, other urban churches have adopted a chorus-based style that displays varying degrees of Africanisation. The result is that contemporary church music in Kenya, particularly the charismatic-based, has become a recognisable national worship 'style' that traditional genres have so far been unable to achieve. Despite drawing heavily on European, American, and sub-Saharan African devotional music, this combined style of worship has led to innovative marketing opportunities of its own, many of which have been learnt from the dance music industry. Music shops in towns have shelves full of 'gospel' recordings for sale, a generic term that covers a wide range of Christian music styles that bear little resemblance to the jazzy gospel singing of southern American churches.

## **5.2 The impact of media**

Although many Sabaot on Mount Elgon live far from urban centres, they are able to access popular music and church styles through a variety of forms of audio-visual and aural media.²⁵ The interest in recorded materials is so extensive that Sabaot will spend money on cassettes when they lack the basic commodities of life. Small cassette outlets are to be found in many villages and it is estimated that some 45% of Sabaot families now own or have access to a radio or audio cassette player. These items represent a sign of progress, and as such, they are not necessarily reserved for discreet home entertainment. Often the volume is turned high for many to hear, and lower down the mountain, people journeying in *matatu's* and 'speed taxis' face being nearly deafened by radio music emanating from internal speakers in these vehicles.

Regardless of the circumstances, when Sabaot hear music being played, their curiosity is aroused and group discussion is likely to follow concerning the names of singers on recordings, the words and the name of the style. Before the advent of such media, the Sabaot had very different music to choose from, ranging from their own traditional songs to those of Bukusu and other neighbours, missionaries and visiting church crusade groups. Now they are able to listen to syncretic styles from the

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²⁵ The term 'media' includes radio.



Congo, church chorus styles, military bands playing Sousa marches, and Asian, Arabic and European music. Erlmann (1991:123) comments that "popular arts seem more flexible and are able to transcend geographical and ethnic boundaries", and although this is partly due to the advantages of media, it is also because much of this music represents the restless yearning of a young urban Africa.

Media technology clearly has the capacity for positive use amongst the Sabaot. Its empowering aspects include the enrichment of ideas, art forms and culture through contact with diverse alternatives, and it reinforces notions of social identity, enabling the expression of frustrations and criticisms that cannot be openly voiced in other ways. People are able to present their own experiences in song, and individuality is encouraged. It also becomes a creative source of performance and compositional techniques that can be applied to more than one genre of music, and can promote endangered musical forms through careful targeting, particularly in areas where mainstream national marketing forces are limited.

The Sabaot are becoming more aware of the impact media can have on and through their culture, but their opinions on how to apply it to their situation vary widely. Older musicians see a need to record their traditional songs so as to ensure their history remains undiluted, whereas young people see media as a gateway to the future. It causes them to dream of electric instruments, of making studio recordings, of composing songs in new styles, of making a career in music.

The majority of younger Sabaot musicians, whether church-goers or not, are now engaged in developing new style songs, many of which are strongly influenced by existing songs on radio and audio cassettes, regardless of whether the language or purpose of the song is understood.²⁶ Techniques which are making a cross-over into church songs and dance music of the Sabaot include fade-outs and slowing of tempo at the ends of songs, as well as a reduction in responsorial singing. Guitars and keyboards are appearing, occasionally with minimal performing expertise, and passive listeners in congregations and social gatherings struggle in uneasy tolerance or bewilderment, just as they did with the introduction of European hymns.

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²⁶ Evident during music workshops held by the author in rural areas of both Kenya and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo between the years 1994-2001.



Media can also be the source of many challenges for minority ethnic groups, as either inadvertently or deliberately, it encourages the formation of a widespread 'media culture'. Much of media output in Kenya today is controlled by a market agenda that has vastly overtaken individual preferences, is designed as a mass commodity, and is being pushed across a wide spectrum of society. As media markets become saturated with particular styles, the parasitic influence of these leads to conventions and stereotyping in performances and the music-making ability of people.

Examples include the many recordings of worship from large urban churches both in Kenya and abroad which are eagerly imitated by rural churches, inadvertently spreading various ideologies concerning the appropriateness or otherwise of traditional music and instruments in worship. This in turn has done little to reduce resistance in rural churches towards their local music. Alternative preferences are still alive within listeners, as shown by the successful marketing of traditional style recordings amongst the Sabaoth by SBTL which are selling as fast as they are produced and enjoyed by many. Yet the pressure of wider market forces continues to overwhelm those musicians that desire to explore this style further.

Despite the commercial popularity of cassette technology, Kenyan musicians face a problem of another kind, namely mounting debt and competition from international recording companies. Ogova Ondego writes:

"Africa... lags behind other continents in the development of her music artistes. It is home to pirates and exploitative forces without proper music infrastructure. Musically speaking, it is a continent of missed opportunities although teeming with undiscovered artistic talent and music genres".²⁷

To counteract this, Kenya has a local performing rights society for musicians (MPRSK), and is also a member of the International Copyright Convention, but another problem exists which has yet to be effectively addressed, the pirating industry of illegal copyists.

When records and audio cassettes became available in West Africa in the early 1970s, copying was officially sanctioned by governments wanting to assist people who were too poor to buy original versions. The concept soon spread across central

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²⁷ In article "Going Back to the Roots", by Ogova Ondego, *Daily Nation*, 13th October 2000.

Africa to Kenya, and as a result, piracy now accounts for a high percentage of total recorded media sales in Kenya. Although this makes cassettes accessible to rural and lower-income groups, it obviously depresses the income of local musicians.

Copyright is a possible solution but is presently impossible to implement in a country such as Kenya. It also sends mixed signals to the traditional music makers such as Kisinja, who have always considered the owner of a song to be the listener rather than the composer. However, a growing number of younger Sabaot performers are now seeking personal recognition for their efforts, spurred on by advertising, the dream of financial gain, and the content of colourful cassette covers found in media outlets.

### **5.3 Musical instruments and dance re-examined**

In addition to the indigenous musical instruments described in chapter three, the guitar is increasingly seen as an integral part of Christian worship and music development amongst the Sabaot. The introduction and spread of the guitar in Kenya has been well documented by ethnomusicologists such as Kavyû (1978), Bender (1991), Schmidt (1994) and Kaye (1998), arriving before the 1900s through mission communities such as Frere Town in Mombasa. The first instruments were the 'dry' (non-electric) acoustic guitars, with players being predominantly Luo and Luhya using vamping or strumming styles.

By the 1950s, the new sound in guitar playing was the thumb and forefinger picking of eastern Congolese players like Jean-Bosco Mwenda. This was then taken up by church guitarists to enable clarity of melody lines in hymns and choruses, whereas *bukantiit* players had already been using such a technique as far back as players could recall.

In the early 1960s, a few younger Sabaot guitar players in towns such as Bungoma and Kitale took their cue from musicians in Nairobi and began playing for hire at weddings and other social events. The response of the older Sabaot community was to castigate them as "lost people" associated with crude dancing, young girls and broken marriages. The commercial orientation of popular music was influencing expectations throughout Kenya's music scene, and it was clear to young ambitious

Sabaot performers that if any money was to be earned through music, it would be found in the towns and not on the mountain. This situation remains little changed today, the one exception being Kisinja who has become a celebrity through invitations to perform at political rallies.

Today the guitar is being used in many lowland churches, and the discomfort felt by elder Sabaot is now gradually fading due to its promotion by the wider church. However, it is also because Sabaot church musicians have been careful to restrain their use of the guitar, aware of the problems that already beset the *bukantiit* with regard to its drinking party associations. The greatest inhibitor to a more rapid spread of the guitar is simply its cost, as relative to family incomes, it is beyond the reach of most. Yet African musicians the continent over are known for their creative instinct, and the Sabaot are no exception, responding with a variety of home-made instruments.

Players of the *bukantiit* have experimented with strumming techniques similar to those used on the guitar, although there is a lack of documentation, particularly of dates, to prove this. Musicians began holding the *bukantiit* sideways instead of upright, as in plate 5a, and devised a means of producing chords by isolating non-sounding strings.



Plate 5a: Duo of *bukantiit* (Silas Kiprop) and guitar (Joseph Morongo)

This was done by hooking fingers of their left hand around those strings not required to be sounded and pulling them outwards, away from the sounding plane of the other strings.

As the comparative volume of a *bukantiit* was clearly weaker than a steel-stringed guitar, at some point before the early 1980s (when missionaries first observed this change), the tuning mechanism on the *bukantiit* began to adopt a peg mechanism on the cross-bar. This was a simplified version of that used by guitars, and a stronger tailpiece was also added in order to cope with the tension of using steel rather than sinew strings. These last two changes have received widespread acceptance amongst *bukantiit* players of all ages, as the more traditional tuning by means of turning cloth wraps on the cross-bar has always been considered difficult.

An increasing number of Sabaot churches are now adding instrumental accompaniments to their worship, with the range of instruments gradually extending. The electronic keyboard (electrophone category, formerly classified as an idiophone of fixed pitches) is the least likely to be found owing to its cost, but is used in some lowland town churches. Of membranophones, only the *kiriinkēēt* drum as described in chapter three is used in churches, although it occurs in several sizes (see plate 3s). Of chordophones, there are the *bukantiit* and guitar, but the *adungu* harp and *ishirini* (one-stringed tube fiddle) can be found in Cheptais and other parts of Mount Elgon where a few Teso from Uganda have settled.

Idiophones of indefinite pitches are increasingly popular, and include borrowed instruments such as the tambourine, *kayamba* (raft rattle), and *chuukaasiit* (*chuukaasinek pl.*, tin shaker). The latter is a metal fly-spray can with wooden handle, filled with stones or seeds, which often accompanies the *kiraanchiit*. The Sabaot do not consider the *chuukaasiit* to be one of their traditional instruments as it appeared in the area after the *Mosoobiisyēk* moved down the mountain in the 1970s. It can be played by both men and women, and is customarily used to mark the pulse line in songs. Another idiophone is referred to only as '*fanta*', being an empty soda bottle

with ridges down the side, scraped with a nail. This improvised 'instrument' was introduced to Kenya in the early 1950s by Congolese bands.

Mention needs to be made of modern or popular dance, as this is a hallmark of songs emanating from city areas. Although it has reached the towns of Bungoma and Kimilili, it is seldom seen on the mountain slopes. Certain styles such as *ndombolo* use overtly sexualised movements, and many Sabaot dislike the idea of thrusting hip actions, tight clothes and high energy output. A far greater dance impact has resulted from visiting crusade groups and urban church choirs, in which both sexes, whether singing in a choir or solo, add a slight swaying motion from side to side.²⁸

Another dance movement comprises a single step forwards and then backwards whilst moving the arms in a gentle forward swinging motion. The Sabaot seldom demonstrate this as vigorously as some city churches, and generally only women and younger men take part whilst older men stay reservedly on the side-lines. As well as in churches, such steps are increasingly adopted during occasions of celebration and entertainment.

The Sabaot style of jumping and head movement described in chapter 4.3 seldom occurs during the singing of modern songs in churches, but when a traditional style worship song is sung the response is very different. At such times, the congregation is hard put to suppress their instinct to begin the *nkach*, and if the music is good, *nkach* develops into a spirited *raan* accompanied by ululatory exclamations and expressions of enjoyment.

Clapping during songs is another traditional feature that is on the increase, both in church settings and on secular occasions. Instead of one clap to mark every pulse as is often the case in traditional song styles, cross-rhythms are now appearing in bursts much as they do in urban football matches, although at present only women and young men engage in this. The manner of clapping is much as in other parts of Africa, the arms swinging downwards between every beat. Miming with hand gestures is sometimes used to clarify the message of the song.

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²⁸ Some denominations still feel uncomfortable with any form of dance or hand-clapping, but miming movements are acceptable. Names are withheld in case of sensitivity.



## 5.4 The influence of the church

Despite the increase in Christian churches amongst the Sabaot since the 1980s, there are still many Christians in the area who believe their worship should reflect the musical tastes of those who first brought the gospel message to Africa. The Sabaot are aware that Christianity is responsible for profound attitudinal changes concerning the development and performance of music in their midst, but very few musicians have considered the possible implications this might have on their traditional genre. Neither have they sought ways to incorporate a greater variety of musical styles into the churches. The songs sung in church weddings are almost entirely chorus style with Swahili words, and traditional songs are seldom used. The church also actively discourages any ceremony that acknowledges the spirit world, such as the purification of the mother after the birth of twins or naming a child after ancestors.

As the influence of the church increases amongst the Sabaot, families now take their children to a pastor to be prayed for and have their children baptised with a Christian name. Despite this, secular beliefs continue to be deeply ingrained in people's lives. For example, when a woman saw three shadows beside her she was greatly disturbed, fearing she had displeased her ancestors. Her first thoughts were of traditional ways to placate them, and only a considerable time later did she also seek advice from her church.²⁹

One of the hallmarks of the Christian church worldwide is that worshippers are drawn to aspects of symbolism and liturgical structure. Universality of the need for worship is often linked to the actual manner or practice of expression, perhaps because "both religion and music involve events of diverse types that occur repeatedly with little change in the basic forms and the basic motivations involved".³⁰ This may explain why, in spite of the relative strangeness of new styles of music introduced by churches, such music is generally accepted and adopted without question. The resulting conflict between church hymnody and indigenous secular music amongst the Sabaot is no stranger to many other countries of East and South Africa.³¹

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²⁹ Grandmother of Kipsisei.

³⁰ Kaemmer, 1980:63.

³¹ Ref. Gichuhi (1997), Gray (1995), Kidula (1986), Mthethwa (1989), Musumba (1992), Mwamidi (1996) and Warnock (1983) amongst others.



Amongst Sabaot musicians, awareness of the interaction between music genres and styles evidences considerable confusion. This is compounded by many of those below the age of thirty having little knowledge of traditional styles due to diminishing exposure to cultural ceremonies in the last few years. Joseph Morongo, born in 1974, is but one example of those for whom non-traditional hymnody has been the major musical influence. Coming from a Christian pastor's family, he has been sheltered from much ceremonial music, and when he started attending church on Mount Elgon, only choruses and hymns were being sung.

Some of these had already been translated into Sabaot, and it is hardly surprising that many in or near his age grouping now unquestioningly consider anything sung in Sabaot to be of Sabaot origin. "If songs are written in Sabaot then they are Sabaot songs".³² This opinion is disputable when it refers to borrowed hymns translated into the vernacular, but not for any choruses which have been locally composed and are taking their place in Sabaot song typology.

Despite the majority of church development amongst the Sabaot owing its origin to the western world and having worship patterns that show little thought for existing African expression, there are signs of change. Pastors are now more open towards worship that borrows from traditional styles, and the use of vernacular is also increasing. A few musicians such as Mulunda and Mang'esoy are actively composing new secular and church songs based on traditional forms and instruments. Mang'esoy in particular has given much thought to using existing traditional melodies which have no offensive ceremonial associations for the church, of which more will be said in the next chapter.

## 5.5 Current Sabaot musical preferences

In determining the various musical preferences of Sabaot of all age groups, I began in the village of Chewangoy with the men who gathered in the early evening social hours for games of *turaafs*. The broad categories that emerged were gospel, Congolese dance, *tāarab*³³ and South African *kwela*, with various names of artistes given in all

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³² Quote by Bernard Chuma, born 1966.

³³ The only Islamic music to be mentioned in this particular survey.

categories. There were also advocates for traditional Sabaot styles. Of Chemengu's two sons, both in their early twenties, one preferred Lingala music and the other Sabaot traditional music because of "the hard words". It should be said here that just as popular music is appreciated for 'conscientising' opinion, so too is this a role of traditional music.

The women near the *posho* mills and seated outside their homes said they only knew church music, and there was much hilarity when I pressed them to talk about dance styles. They cited links with immorality and loose living, but it seems this did not preclude them from listening to or enjoying such music. Older women such as Chemunui and Ayaasi Maasai told me quite firmly that they were not interested in the newer music. However, I later observed an old woman in a circumcision event near Kobsiuro switch from singing traditional songs to placing a radio in front of the female candidates and dancing to Lingala music, presumably to take their mind off the pain.

Similar responses for both men and women occurred in Cheptais, Kapsokwony and Saboti. Elders everywhere expressed strong dislike for music seen as city orientated and sexually provocative. Kisinja did not like to hear his people deviating from the Sabaot song styles, saying:

"God's songs need honour. Now we have the devil's music in God's house, with dancing transformed from discos to the church".

He later revealed the conflict in himself by adding he liked "hymns from a book". For most Sabaot, sub-categorisation within the broad typologies of 'popular' and 'traditional' is still uncommon, and Barber's observation (1987:10) that "traditional is the known starting point, and popular is identified by the degree to which it deviates" could be written with many Sabaot in mind.

Although perhaps a sign of things to come in church worship, the songs of Mang'esoy and others are presently very much in the minority and easily swept aside by the latest chorus styles. The Sabaot appear to be losing pride in their distinctiveness, abandoning their unique identity amongst the people groups of Kenya, and seeing identity with the wider whole as more advantageous to their future. Their own people are becoming increasingly diverse in background, ranging from university graduates, teachers, politicians and church leaders to those who have never left the

mountain or attended school. Although they demonstrate the same receptivity towards new songs styles as many other ethnic groups in Kenya, the difference is that some Sabaot are clearly disturbed by the trend yet few are making serious moves to counteract the onslaught. This can be contrasted with people groups such as the Duruma and Daasanach who are openly stating their desire to halt the erosion of traditional music.

Despite a growing determination by African churches to define Christianity from an African rather than a western perspective, most Sabaot still unquestioningly accept statements such as "Western music brings me closer to God".³⁴ A survey carried out by Capital FM Radio in Kenya, 1998, showed that more than 70% of its listeners preferred religious music, but neglected to add that most of the religious music played by Capital FM is foreign.

On the mountain, few Christians question the styles of worship introduced by visiting crusades or the implications of using song texts in Swahili, and few have more than a basic grasp of Biblical teaching on acceptable worship despite being in positions of leadership:

"I'm not sure how our worship started, but we mostly sing in Swahili. There has been no teaching on worship other than being told we could kneel or stand, but we have freedom to choose where to sing within a structured service. When we have assessed ourselves as a Christian we are encouraged to become a choir master or other such leader within our church".³⁵

Another discerning observation comes from Joseph Morongo, a young church musician who has noticed that people seemed tired when singing slow hymns, and that they leave unsatisfied after the service.

Finally, and perhaps most disturbing, is the belief amongst many Sabaot that the medium of popular music now receives wider credibility and recognition than a minority culture style, with the latter perceived as unfashionable and of lower class heritage. Mang'esoy illustrates the reluctance to be seen in urban areas promoting things that are linked with rural ways:

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³⁴ Quote by Peter Nzioki, *Daily Nation*, 31 July 1998 (a church musician).

³⁵ Interview with Bernard Mulunda in English language, September 1998. Bernard attends Kibumet Church of Christ, planted in 1996.

"Unless God intervenes, our traditional music will be watered down by western styles, electronic media, guitars and keyboards. Our young people are ashamed to be seen holding the *bukantiit* in towns. When I went to Nairobi in 1995 to record an interview for KBC, I carried my *bukantiit*, but a man on the street asked me, 'Why do you carry this in Nairobi? Why do you not use a guitar?' I replied, 'Because the *bukantiit* speaks my language. I am a Sabaot and will never claim to be a foreigner, so why should I reject what speaks to me? Such an instrument has nothing to do with evil or being primitive, but it is a way to deliver God's message for my people. The guitar does not fit the natural way of speaking for us'."

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## CHAPTER 6: CULTURE RESPONSE

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*-Mēērēērchi keep ng'ālyoo nyēē -'mēēmuuchē.*

Do not pull yourself towards something you are unable to hold.

*Lit.* Do-not-strive one-self to deal with an issue that is beyond your ability.

Sabaot proverb

### 6.1 Introduction

Examination of the music genres used by the Sabaot would be incomplete without consideration of the underlying processes of change that fuel the heart of cultural response within their community. Owing to the wide choice of expressive forms now freely available across much of Africa, 'culture' is becoming as difficult to define as 'tradition'. The interplay of influences and choices in a person's life means that the incidence of cultural imprinting through being born in a particular group is diminishing.

Hoebel's definition of culture as "the integrated system of learned behaviour patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance",¹ still acknowledges that a person relates at a deeper level to the socio-cultural context of their early years. This is particularly so in relatively stable population groupings such as the Sabaot, but it is equally clear that the boundaries of social experiences are rapidly expanding.

Conscious of problems caused by deep-seated tribal loyalties, voices from a cross-section of those living in urban centres are now advocating that the future of Kenya's people lies in "detrribalising" out of the cultural contexts of their grandparents.² Although this appears to have already been done by those that have relocated to urban areas, the reality is that a strong social expectation remains for extended family links to be maintained at all costs. The steady trickle of Sabaot that have migrated to various urban centres in Kenya and Uganda join the national tide of people returning 'up-country' to visit rural relatives and strengthen community bonds. This in turn requires considerable behavioural adaptation as one environment is

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¹ Hoebel, 1972:6.

² Ref. "Kikuyu, Luo, we are all Kenyans I think", Carol Mandi, *Daily Nation*, 31/10/99.

temporarily exchanged for another, whilst those in the rural areas are increasingly aware of the choices brought by the wider world.

The result of such interchange is that the 'model of reality' governing people's perceptions (Kraft, 1979:48) is expanding into a series of contrasting environs, a complex model of multi-layered interaction that is conditioning future behaviour.³ There is nothing unexpected or even new about these processes. What prompts the choices, and what action, if any, is taken is ultimately more important.

As people flex from one situation to another in a fast changing world, many groups are exhibiting an increase in bi-culturality, or the ability to be grounded in two distinct cultures. As yet, most of the Sabaot on Mount Elgon would not be classifiable as bi-cultural, but cultural layering in their life-styles is on the increase. Duality of old and new can be seen, for example, in the styles of housing used on the mountain.

Although many Sabaot living on the mid to upper slopes still build round huts with conical grass roofs, the predominant style in and around trading centres is square buildings with tin roofs. A Sabaot elder recounts the tale of a local boy who had been working in a town and whose first action on returning to the mountain was to construct for himself a square house. Some liked it and others complained, but it was not considered a big enough issue to make him pull it down and rebuild in the Sabaot style. Although the majority of Sabaot declare that values they inherited from their lineage are still firmly in place, in the case of housing, the differences were tolerated and then accommodated, to the extent that numbers of square houses are now increasing all over the mountain.

People are not so accommodating when a man from another tribe requests to marry a Sabaot girl. He is required to abide with all Sabaot customs, set aside his own cultural ways, and eventually be inducted into a *binta* (age-set) and *areet* (clan). He also undergoes rituals such as head shaving, circumcision, and the taking of a new name. The distinction between these two examples is deliberate on the part of the Sabaot. Different styles of houses are seen as inevitable progress, and most Sabaot who have been to school feel their people will increasingly welcome rather than resist

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³ Ref. Kroeber and Kluckhohn's work on cultural concepts, 1952.



things such as this. Change on a social level, however, is recognised as more serious, with the potential to weaken communal identity.

Proponents of interpretative anthropology such as Clifford Geertz (1973) see social phenomena as the embodiment of culture, particularly in non-complex, homogeneous groups where uniformity and cohesiveness are considered important. The social structures and values of the Sabaot have been designed to optimise survival, and their instinct for ethnic solidarity at times of stress or upheaval has been well honed. Mechanisms such as the bonding of clans have helped weather historical hardships such as cattle rustling and territorial district formations.

Despite or perhaps because of the Sabaot being a statistical minority compared to many of their neighbours, there is a strong desire to remain Sabaot in spirit, expressed by both young and old. Their language shows no sign of dying, and many of their narrative songs relate events that have shaped the community or drawn them together. Their distinctive location is also important to them, and when referring to their home they speak of "*Tulwēēnyoo*" ('our mountain') or "*Kōōrēēnyoo*" ('our nation of Sabaot') rather than a district or province.

Yet in music, there appears to be a different set of criteria, with the role of music now moving from the communal identity level to one that is led by individual desires. "People yearn for the things they see in the hands of others",⁴ and awareness of self-needs and progress is being shaped by changing criteria, including the definition of identity. Previously, songs had a number of different levels of significance when it came to an identity role, but community was promoted above all else. A clan song might have more obvious intent to encourage bonding than a work song, but both were time-and purpose-specific. Contrast this now with a decreasing consensus amongst Sabaot over the identity function of recent songs.

It is true that the collecting of examples of ethnic music systems is "a means of preserving a people's cultural identity" (Chenoweth, 1980:16), but preserving music is not necessarily the intent of the Sabaot. What is likely to be more relevant than preservation is finding ways in which identity can be incorporated with the growth of new ideas.

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⁴ Shorter, 1999:11.

Everyone on the mountain recognises that the more recent song styles symbolise ideals of a wider African scene. However, duality between progress and social identity means that those who openly align themselves with "the Sabaot way"⁵ feel they are forced to compromise, having to listen to the new song styles for the sake of communal solidarity or to create an impression of embracing progress.

Language use causes a similar predicament. Despite the Sabaot viewing one of their own who speaks only Swahili as "lost" and trying "to look good", they themselves are reluctant to use Sabaot in the lower trading towns for fear of being intimidated.

"When I went to Bungoma for a visit in the late 1980s I spoke in Sabaot, but some Bukusu said to me they didn't want to hear that language again".⁶

Baumann's (1991:17) definition of music as incorporating "a set of cultural and intercultural patterns of behaviour" implies that understanding of an incoming genre is limited until it is integrated with the cultural value system that already exists. Two thoughts arise concerning the Sabaot. Firstly, it is evident that recent music styles, in particular urban church worship, have achieved only partial community integration. They are favoured by church-goers and the youth, but random interviews amongst Sabaot aged over forty and those who are not actively attending any church reveal equally strong preferences for more traditional music styles.

Secondly, it appears an incoming genre can override the necessity for integration if the mode through which it is introduced has unusual capacity for growth. As already stated, evidence of Christianity is spreading rapidly amongst the Sabaot, and the results of this affirm the importance and nature of agents of change. Many new churches have been started on the mountain in the last twenty years, and in most cases these have adopted a similar worship style to that of other churches nearby, resulting in rapid transfer with minimal variation. The disquiet felt by some has been insufficient to stem such a swift incoming tide, partly because the voices have not been heard, and partly because there has never been a previous musical challenge on this scale to which the Sabaot can turn for comparative purposes.

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⁵ Kisinja, September 1998.

⁶ As related by Stanley Ndiema, November 1999.

Before going further, a word of explanation is needed concerning the remaining layout of this chapter. The intention in the following three sections is to focus primarily on the theories of musical change, and then to allow the subsequent responses in section 6.5 to speak for themselves.

## **6.2 The epistemology of change**

Culture can be compared to an organic, self-regulating system, constantly evaluating and adjusting internally to various stimuli. Such situational adaptation, according to Goldschmidt,⁷ means that the essential being does not change, and if this is the case, then a music system must likewise be capable of embodying change whilst keeping its inherent nature intact. "Radical change is rare, change that occurs within a system, normal".⁸ The implication is that this model is limited, but in effect, it may enable change to be more effectively assessed within a stable structure.

There are many teleological dynamics (notions of progress or of cause and effect) that determine whether or not change takes root, and I will try to examine these through the eyes of the Sabaot. As with any society, they perceive change factors with mixed value judgements. Individual and group-specific responses will be discussed later, but in terms of actual process, the first steps towards accepting something new are likely to be triggered by an innovative thought or behaviour pattern that differs in some manner from the existing cultural norm.

A typical example amongst the Sabaot of innovative change is being evidenced in the traditional approach to circumcision (as described in chapter four). This rite is still seen as the symbolic threshold to adulthood, but both the national church and Government have concerns. As a result, some 20% of Sabaot boys are now circumcised in the safer environment of clinics, and an estimated 40% of girls opt out of the ceremony in its entirety.⁹ Feelings amongst parents towards such changes are mixed, as despite the health publicity, many older Sabaot still feel that circumcision in the homesteads has deep-seated significance. The contrast is seen in comments such as: "Only Christians send their children to hospitals to be circumcised" (implying they

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⁷ In the epilogue of Edgerton, 1971:303.

⁸ Nettl, 1983:178.

⁹ Estimates given by Kiboki Kigai (SBTL), September 1998.

lack courage); "Only a traditional ceremony can test the courage of the candidates"; and "Circumcision in hospitals is a sign of progress".

Before any concept can move from a transient phase to becoming integrated into established behaviour patterns, it must first pass through a grid of social evaluation.¹⁰ Forced change is a possible exception, but there is no evidence of this currently taking place amongst the Sabaot. The social grid is represented at the formal level by the *baraza* or community council, in effect the voice of the community. Below this are many different strata where consensus may or may not exist, meaning the task of the *baraza* is to facilitate community unification in the adoption of change.

On Mount Elgon, music impacts the belief systems of churches, traditionalists and 'progressionists', being those who believe in every new idea and style that appears. I am mindful of Merriam (1959:81(i)) and Carrington's (1948:198-99) observations that the coming of the missionary and subsequent ideological pressure of the church has been perhaps the most influential instrument of change. It is true that in the case of the Sabaot, no single historical event has caused socio-cultural transformation on the same scale as Christianity, although other forces such as education, foreign donor agencies, national idealism, new technologies and media are all playing their part.

The Quakers,¹¹ who led the earliest known evangelistic movement on the mountain, often used prayer and meditation rather than singing, but the greatest impact has sprung from churches in Bungoma and Kitale which were founded on Anglican and Protestant traditions and adopted a strong tradition of western worship. Hymns were commonly used in Mount Elgon churches from the mid-1970s onwards, and have now been superseded in popularity by the evangelical chorus structure which appeared in the 1980s.

For many Sabaot, it appears these forms of music have metamorphosed from uncomfortable garment to accepted musical expression, absorbed to such an extent that many would now argue they have always been the 'owners' of such music. I am reminded of an amusing example of acculturation discovered by Colin M. Turnbull whilst recording music of the remote Twa pygmoids in the Kivu mountains of N.E.

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¹⁰ Ref. writings of Spradley/ McCurdy, 1989:302-324.

¹¹ See chapter 2.5.

Congo.¹² An old woman sang to him what she described as a greatly revered traditional melody, which turned out to be the French song 'Clementine'.

Despite these additions to the music repertoire of the Sabaot, there is a conservatism evident that, as yet, appears to have prevented any significant transformation of the pre-existing music system.¹³ This may be because the traditional songs have already survived a considerable degree of social upheaval and are naturally resistant to further change. However, this is unlikely to indicate a complete lack of interest in revival of traditional music, as the Sabaot have already demonstrated a flexibility in approach during the shift from pastoralism to agrarian life. During this time, additions were made to the work song genre to cater for the actions of grinding and threshing.

Another sign of the inherent strength of Sabaot disposition is that when their youth return to the mountain bearing degrees, they are given authority and respect beyond their age group and accorded the status of "a man who must be listened to". More significantly, they are welcomed back into the fold despite having left the mountain for considerable lengths of time.¹⁴ They are not categorised as outsiders and there are no signs of undue relational frictions with elders on their return.

In short, the Sabaot have a strong sense of social homogeneity, and there is prestige in being "pure Sabaot". They are proud of their history and treasure what is considered theirs by birth-right. A proverb puts it thus:

*Amee mumuy, -mee-amee keelat.*

Don't use your teeth to eat, use your gums.

(Don't crush or misuse your resources but be gentle).

Parents teach this to children when they begin herding, saying:

"We depend on these resources (cattle) so be careful with them, graze them properly and don't mistreat them".

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¹² 'Music of the Rain Forest Pygmies of the North-East Congo'. Recorded by Colin M. Turnbull, Lyrichord LLCT 7157.

¹³ Lomax (1959, 1968) similarly concluded that older forms of music exhibit more conservative tendencies.

¹⁴ The Sabaot age-sets do not move in seven-year progressions of recurring rituals such as the Maasai, for whom extended absence means a person can no longer keep pace with his age-set and is excluded.

Yet even though most Sabaot appear determined not to become "assimilated" or "eaten up" in any way, the young have a hunger for improving their lifestyles and measuring up with the country and world around them. There is a growing belief that traditional ways are pulling them back to the past, conflicting with their desire to move forwards. Many of the choices are confusing for them, but that is hardly a problem for the Sabaot alone: much of Africa is still trying to come to terms with the implications of change, or more specifically, modernisation. What is also very different is that in urban circles, music is increasingly perceived as a social game in which the participants use their talents to search and attain a place in the society within which they interact, unlike the relative anonymity of songs in the rural homelands.

In examining the processes of change, there has been a call amongst ethnomusicologists for redefining the boundaries of cultural contact, including why such contact appears to cause a reduction in "musical energy" (Nettl, 1978:129). This sense of energy in terms of motivation and output is highly pertinent to the Sabaot situation, as church music styles are evidencing high levels of interest and social activity whilst there is noticeably less energy channelled into the older music system. One consequence already visible amongst the Sabaot is a reduction in the number of musicians familiar with the traditional repertoire, and it would seem that some highlighting of this imbalance is needed if total inertia is not to result.

The vitality of the church 'culture' means that the Sabaot have a dynamic nature that bodes well for the future of music-making in their midst. Studying their processes of selectivity in the face of innovation may give clues as to the eventual outcome for their traditional genres.¹⁵

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¹⁵ It is encouraging that the creative urge can appear when least expected, and if feathered friends can provide an innovative twist, so can man. In recent years, the male young of the dwindling NW Connecticut Sedge Wren have stopped imitating the territorial call pattern or dialect of their parents, and are now taking a basic pattern and improvising around it. This change in song enables them to move out of territorial locations in search of a mate, rather like a wandering minstrel. Because they are no longer confined to finding a mate that responds to a particular pattern of song, they increase the chances of extending the species. *Edwin Colyer*, "Tweets for my Sweet". *New Scientist* No. 2233, 8/4/00. See also Penalosa (1981) for theories on selective adoption.



### 6.2.1 Causes of resistance and rejection

If freedom of expression exists, people's assessment of change can result in outright acceptance or rejection. Likewise, with a lesser degree of freedom, response may be covert to the point of hidden resistance. It is not uncommon in Africa for things associated with a foreign life-style to have been perceived as superior in the past, thereby encouraging people's alienation from their own culture. The musicologist David Coplan (1978:99) describes such a situation amongst the Fanti of the Gold Coast:

"They were the first to develop a purely indigenous westernised social and economic elite, who identified with and assimilated western cultural values, and to varying degrees became hostile to their own native political, social, and cultural systems".

However, Kubik (1994:35) refers to music of the West African coast as "virtually immune to change", adding that in respect to metre,

"There is no force in the world which can change the internal mathematics of the asymmetric time-line patterns".

His conclusion is that secondary attributes such as tempo, accentuation and instruments may change, but the 'internal' components remain intact.

One of the reasons for this dichotomy of response may be linked to the speed or manner of implementation of new concepts. Novelty in any form will inevitably arouse the value judgement of a society, but if either the process or the result happens too fast, personal defence mechanisms of those involved can switch to rejection. If there is uncertainty between the familiar and the unknown, suspicions are easily raised when something is not immediately understood. Recipients have either an instinctive conservatism towards the unfamiliar or a natural openness to new things.

Further problems occur when change is perceived as requiring people to make a decision between their past and the future, splitting them two ways. Older people tend to relate to a stable cultural base that can absorb change when it is counter-balanced by strong links of affinity with already existing aspects of life-style or social order, but the younger people want to try new pastures. The older members of church congregations struggle to learn the new song style but it is clear that many of them feel uncomfortable with the direction worship is taking. Younger people, on the other

hand, forge ahead with new ideas and ignore the past, as the conceptual linking of new styles with progress is strong.

Judging by an existing Sabaot proverb, the implications should already be recognisable to them:

*Yoo kaluk :tany -/mākēyyēyyēē tarka.*

Don't break the milk-gourd when the cow stops giving milk.

(Don't throw out the baby with the bath water).

It is also possible for changes to be adopted and appear to flourish, only to then be rejected. An interesting example of this is found in an Anglican Church established amongst the Bemba people at Chipili, Zambia. In 1933 a European priest (Anglican) published a hymnbook containing three categories of songs: European hymns, hymns used by a related dialect group, and hymns based on existing Bemba songs. In a subsequent case study by Mapoma (1969:72-88) of the hymnody used in this church, it was found that the congregation's preference had swung strongly towards using translated Western hymns.

The reasons given were as follows:¹⁶

1. The Anglican priests held opposing views on the use of folk melodies in church.
2. The congregation began objecting to certain songs because they originated from a neighbouring dialect.
3. The attitudes of Europeans towards African folk music (seen as primitive) caused church members to believe that if they continued to use such music they would be denied progress and be unable to attain political equality with Europeans.
4. Young people considered folk-music out-moded.
5. Folk-derived songs were seen as being relevant for the transition of prospective church converts only.
6. In the secular context, popularity of local dances changed quickly, meaning the church was seen as the institution "in which the songs of defunct dances were perpetuated". This led to a conflict between people singing more recent dances outside the church and those using outmoded ones inside the church.

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¹⁶ Further discussed by Neeley, 1994: 29-33.

The situation with the Sabaot is somewhat different to that outlined above, but there are similarities in the outcome. The majority of church leaders are not actively negative towards changes in worship, but those who have had theological training elsewhere in Kenya clearly favour the styles they have been exposed to, namely non- or semi-Africanised hymns and choruses. They also prefer to use Swahili for song texts rather than Sabaot and English.

The Sabaot do not perceive equality with Europeans as dependent on musical choice, but they do exhibit a tendency to imitate what is promoted in the Kenyan urban church context, this being more an issue of modernisation than of westernisation. The same imitation occurs of music promoted on national Christian radio programmes, as radio is seen as giving approval or credibility to that which is broadcast, and helps songs move from a negative to an accepted status within those sectors of a host culture that are open to such stimuli.

The knowledge that hundreds of other churches in Kenya are already using western hymnody has helped speed the process of acceptance amongst Sabaot church-goers on Mount Elgon. It is nonetheless evident from song composition workshops that with encouragement, young people are still open to experimenting with the use of *bukantiit* song styles in worship.

Considering the feelings of uncertainty the Sabaot once faced through forced relocation to lower areas of the mountain, no-one can accuse today's elders of being strangers to the challenges of change. They are acutely aware of the upheavals and decision-making that this brings, and there is a sense of unease as they see their social structures weakening and their own influence beginning to wane. This does not constitute resistance on their part, but gives background to their reluctance to accept the new forms of music appearing in their midst.

Likewise, the concept of national unity currently prominent in Kenyan politics is a source of further unsettlement to them, as it raises memories of land and cattle tensions. The Sabaot, along with many other tribal entities in Kenya, remain unconvinced as to whether their future in the wider ethnic representation will be one of cultural coexistence or cultural subjugation, and the wariness of older Sabaot towards anything that they see as possibly diluting their ethnicity is hardly surprising.

Influences are not always clear-cut, particularly in developing countries where changes are fuelled by many different agendas without a central design. Psychological factors such as the desire to adopt modern technology and achieve a more affluent life-style require considerable internal and external adaptation, and are compounded by a subconscious conflict between residual post-colonial Kenyan resentment of being 'westernised' and the longing to try new ideas.¹⁷ Cultural 'outsiders' such as teachers, Government and church workers are entering the Sabaot community, and many are either unaware of or unconcerned about the influence they can exert.

It is possible for several lines of musical development to coexist as separate strands within the same culture, and a pre-existing system will not necessarily capitulate or even undergo assimilation with an incoming system. In such cases, non-integration does not necessarily imply rejection but rather a state of coexistence or compartmentalisation. With people now used to the realities of societal multilingualism in their community, there is little reason why they should not be predisposed to wider communicational possibilities in other fields, becoming multimusical in the same way that they are multilingual. When university graduates return to the mountain they are fluent in Sabaot, Swahili and English, and subsequently choose their language depending on social context. This linking or 'coordinate lingualism' would be similar to differentiating between song contexts of church and secular ceremonies.

It is easy for outsiders to see new ways of doing things appearing in a community and to assume these patterns will persist. In reality, such changes may be only by-products of some form of coercion, whether it be in the form of peer group pressure, perceived advantage, or (in the church) ecclesiastical authority. Once the pressure or apparent advantage is gone, the behaviour will modify towards whatever aesthetic values, core beliefs, assumptions, and procedural understandings were previously shared as a community. In effect, the arena of true culture change is not how things are done, but the collective mind of a group.

Blacking observed in his work on African Venda Children's Songs (in Byron, 1995:73-99) that the introduction of additional notes to an existing five-note scale did

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¹⁷ Also discussed by Elbourne, 1975:182.

not mean the death of the pentatonic scale but the co-existence of two systems side by side. This was an important finding, reinforcing earlier suggestions that it is possible for indigenous cultures to switch their interest to another music genre and later reverse such changes with no obvious overlay (Lull, 1991:3). Such a process is not uncommon in the history of western music where written archives can be consulted for the revival of earlier genres. For oral-based cultures the success of overlays is likely to depend more on *how* change is introduced, and whether it is perceived as cultural dominance or cultural coexistence. It may also depend on which maintenance factors are available and whether people think it is important to foster their 'Sabaotness' (ethnic affiliation).

Theory is one thing, reality is another. At the time of writing this, the extent to which Sabaot musicians have sought fluency in both traditional and more recent systems has been minimal. Those who *do* have skills in several systems are tending to show marked preference for one above all the others. Hood (1960:58) wryly commented that a musician would demonstrate bi-musicality "just as far as his objective takes him", which is why individual rather than group or social perception of a particular music system's value must not be overlooked.¹⁸

### 6.2.2 The impact of associative links

Most Sabaot traditional songs are intended for a specific function, whether ceremonial, work or entertainment. Musical instruments are also linked to song categories, and the young musician must learn what is appropriate for every occasion. The arrival of the church in Africa has brought a clash of musical values, with few attempts to research the suitability of existing indigenous music forms as vehicles of worship, and in some cases, active discouragement as to their continuing use.

Songs and instruments linked with 'pagan rites' are believed to have sufficient associative strength to draw people back to their former ways. As a result, suspicion exists amongst some local Christians on Mount Elgon that the *bukantiit* is 'sinful' owing to its association with popular beer parties, in turn giving rise to the misconception that traditional songs are only sung by people when they are drunk.

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¹⁸ Also ref. Euba's (1970) investigations of bi-musicality.



The alternative offered by the early church on Mount Elgon has been to adopt worship styles that are clearly foreign. This is dangerously close to the Kemalism belief that modernisation is incompatible with indigenous culture and therefore the latter must be abandoned or replaced with a complete transplant imported from another civilisation.¹⁹ Having witnessed the ongoing struggles of countless people groups to relate to the song styles that churches have advocated as suitable worship, it is clear that the church must take considerable responsibility for the depletion of indigenous music systems and instruments in Africa.

In thinking how this imbalance can be addressed, the work of Martin Stokes (1994:17) and a number of more recent ethnomusicologists has shown how the incorporation of musical differences within a culture becomes in itself an essential part of the process of maintaining ethnicity and identity. The adjustments that face Sabaot Christians lie in deciding whether they wish to explore this. They also need to decide whether a music system designed for a secular function can retain any of its identity when used in a religious context that presently has few hallmarks of belonging to the Sabaot.

It would seem, judging by the attendance at song workshops, that many Sabaot are becoming aware of this issue, but not that there have been similar transitions elsewhere in Africa from which they could draw encouragement. For example, the *balafon* (wooden xylophone) still retains its traditional place in various rites of passage ceremonies in West African countries such as Côte d'Ivoire,²⁰ but its players have created a new genre specifically for Christian worship in order that the instrument can now be accepted in Senufo churches. Likewise, the *kayamba* (raft rattle) of Kenya was originally used by the Digo people during pagan spirit dances, but is now one of the most popular instruments throughout churches in eastern Africa, having shed its past to such an extent that many are unaware of its original use.

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¹⁹ Huntington (1996:73) suggests Kemalism is more prevalent in the West.

²⁰ King, 1989.



Associations can also be used to advantage,²¹ defying Carrington's (1948:198-199) foreboding that any attempt to introduce secular tunes into church worship would be "doomed to failure". There remain limits as to which song types are suitable for such a transition, as memories persist far beyond the substitution of new words into an existing song. Mang'esoy, for one, will not use circumcision songs as the basis for his Christian songs as he feels the associations are still too strong, despite his obvious desire to bring together the realms of traditional and church music.

### 6.3 Language shift theories and models of music change

It is possible, although unlikely, that the traditional music system currently facing challenge amongst the Sabaot is similar in function, purpose and structure to that which accompanied the Sabaot in their historical arrival on Mount Elgon. Musicians of today can give no clues of any historical diversification in their music system other than ascribing different song 'tempi' to the varying rates of dialectical speech.²² This does not mean that musical cross-cultural synthesis from surrounding tribes can be ruled out, as even though several strata of styles may be concurrent and functioning to some degree as independent musical systems, cross-over is likely at some stage.

On the demographic front, the Sabaot are a minority grouping amongst the wider Kalenjin language family, and it would be reasonable to expect influences to emanate from the groups surrounding them. However, the Sabaot do not have an obvious history of cultural capitulation, and until now have maintained a considerable number of factors that have effectively resisted many superordinate pressures. They are indigenous to the area and cohesive in their spatial distribution. Immigration to and from Mount Elgon is minimal, and although traditional ceremonies are decreasing, ethnicity, kinship and cross-cultural pressures have cemented those that remain. They are neither disparaged nor a low-status group, and their collective desire to be known as Sabaot is still strong.

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²¹ As in redemptive analogies. For example, the warrior songs (*Gúódib*) constitute the most revered song category of the Daasanach people in northern Kenya, being sung before a cattle raid to build morale amongst the fighters. Composers from their midst decided during a song workshop (with Taylor, Ileret, August-September 1998) that the *Gúódib* genre is also the music that best symbolises God's greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-31).

²² Of which no supporting evidence has been found, as yet, in recordings.

So what is changing today? It seems that despite verbal contra-indications, cultural 'maintenance' factors amongst the Sabaot are now succumbing to change phenomena which have been observed in other less socially bonded people groups. In searching for indicators within music, we need to remember that in Africa there is a predominance of music with an interactive relationship between melody and word.

Language and music are both specialised in their own right with their own sets of behavioural rules, but it does not follow that the rules remain unchanged when these modes of communication interact in partnership. Rather, there develops a state of cultural interdependence, observed by Merriam (1964:187) and Bright (1963:27), and supported more recently by investigations of phonological tone, syllable stress and phraseology conditioning.²³ Even when words are not uttered, their influence remains formative as in the talking drums of Ghana, Congo and other countries. In the case of the Sabaot, purely aesthetic use of music without text does not occur, hence no examination of their songs would be complete without consideration of both.

Research into language shift has opened new pathways for ethnomusicologists to explore, being long overdue in the opinion of some:

"Variation and change in language is undoubtedly one of the oldest and most studied phenomena in linguistics, but more needs to be done on transitory movements in music. It is considered that variation and change are crucial to understanding the progress of a language's evolution, but music tends to be pushed into compartments or phases" (Kapanga, 1991:46).

Part of this imbalance is due to interest in the processes of musical change occurring independently of music-language issues, but Kapanga's point is that the development of music has tended to be aligned with defined periods of history or particular musical structures. These in turn have invited greater focus than the actual processes of transition themselves. If music is assessed in more independent terms, there is no reason why the theories of language shift cannot be cross-related, particularly when the two components derive from the same cultural pool.

The Sabaot scenario today is one of many cultures in juxtaposition with each other, namely Sabaot, the church, Kenya, wider Africa and indirectly, the world.

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²³ Reference Gray (1995) and Powers (1980).

Understanding and predicting the consequences of such contacts has given rise to many different ideas, of which diffusionist theory²⁴ is at the broadest end of the spectrum. This proposes that absorption of elements between cultures will inevitably stem from contact. In the case of the Sabaot, little can be said concerning interaction of their music system pre 1900, but the impression of their current music scene is that traditional, church and dance musics exist in a state of uneasy non-interaction. On closer examination, however, there are signs that 'accommodation' followed by absorption is taking place across certain boundaries.

The linguistic theory of 'accommodation' states that when two or more mutually intelligible dialects are in contact, there are likely to be transfers of items from one variety to another. It is not difficult to envisage symbiotic relationships between two or more different music systems, but the addition of 'mutual intelligibility' is a problem as acceptance of another music system does not imply that the users fully comprehend its inherent rules, its compatibility with existing systems, or its original meaning. It is more common that the transfer of patterns through imitation depends on which accelerating or inhibiting factors are present, and the eventual outcome is a state of co-existence between the systems concerned. One also needs to be aware that situations considered as changes from western ideals, such as the free use of parallel fourths and fifths in African polyphony,²⁵ may not be the result of transfer but fully indigenous.

When musical elements move beyond accommodation and into common use, the process of adaptation changes to syncretism, this being the fusion of whatever elements from different systems seem preferable at the time to users. For example, Eṭundayo Phillips of Nigeria believes that Yoruba chant is the missing evolutionary link between Gregorian chant and later forms of religious music, although doubts as to the relevancy of this have been voiced by other ethnomusicologists. Nketia calls

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²⁴ Ref. F.M. Keesing, 1958:27.

²⁵ Macpherson (1904:4,11) and Piston (1966:24) each note the avoidance in 18th-19th century harmonic progression of parallel fourths (unless supported by parallel thirds below) and parallel fifths. Morris (1931:146-148) rails against 'forbidden consecutives', likening them to 'sheep-intervals' that deny flexibility and reality in composition.

Phillips' approach "outmoded" (1998:37), but acknowledges it is an approach that develops syncretism as a compositional technique.

With the Sabaot, syncretism is clearly evident in that the *bukantiit* has now absorbed construction and performance techniques from the guitar, and recent church songs are adopting minor performance practices such as slowing of tempo towards the end.²⁶

The study of syncretism in languages extends possibilities further. For example, with significant contact between languages in close proximity, there is a tendency for what Hans Hock (1986) calls the "interference theory", resulting in the formation of a transitory or 'link language'. Certain aspects of one language are retained and superimposed on the other, involving processes pertinent to both language and music. The first is when the primary language or mother tongue interferes with the structure of the acquired, second language. For example, the Swahili language has consonants not used in Sabaot, hence Sabaot speakers will automatically substitute familiar consonants for unfamiliar ones:

Swahili say:	Sabaot say:
<i>kuchieza</i> (to play)	<i>kuchiesa</i>
<i>kupiga</i> (to beat)	<i>kupika</i> (which in Swahili means to cook)

Linguistically, it would seem that if too great a difference exists between system components, there is less likelihood of syncretism occurring. However, certain Sabaot songs exhibit wider linking effects, one being the substitution of roles. Men normally will never sing lullabies and *mēliilto* (leopard) songs in public as these are traditionally reserved for women alone, but it is not uncommon for men to be familiar with these genres, thus increasing the chances of passing on such songs should the opportunity arise.

Another variant of the interference theory is code mixing or code switching between languages, the most obvious example being *sheng*, a Kenyan slang that combines English, Swahili, rap sounds and vernacular expressions, and is popular with young people in urban areas. The more obvious musical parallel amongst the Sabaot is those *bukantiit* players who switch between pluck and strum styles, but as noted in

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²⁶ For further discussion on syncretism, see Merriam, 1964:313-315.

chapter three, there is no conclusive evidence that these are not both indigenous styles. In actual songs, there is little evidence of deliberate code switching, with the various genres remaining separate. Some interesting exceptions have occurred in workshops and will be discussed in chapter eight.

It is also possible that linguistic convergence will occur, in which the choice of language and vocabulary is adjusted to suit use in specific social conditions such as schools, churches or public meetings. This is common-place amongst Sabaot musicians, the expectation being that song texts will be adapted to fit the situation. They are also aware of the distinctions drawn between perceived contexts of church and secular music use, but there is no indication that a new genre is emerging to bridge or merge any aspects of these.

The interference theory has been extended by Thomason and Kaufman (1988:40-41) to include a phenomenon resulting from the process of borrowing foreign features whilst maintaining the original language. They pose that 'substratum interference' will occur when errors are inadvertently spread and imitated during group learning, not in vocabulary but in sounds and syntax. This is much the same as when a choir copies from an audio tape a song that is sung in a language with which they are unfamiliar, unaware that their imitation and subsequent adoption is paving the way to influencing subsequent use of the language and/or music. Some might call this 'distortion', a term often linked to the diffusion perspective, but this has negative connotations that I do not wish to make of any Sabaot music. It needs to be repeated that the aim of this study is not to decry the present situation but to examine the process of change and how this bodes for future music development amongst the Sabaot.

Much of the above presupposes that the interaction between systems is dependent on the free selection process of its users. However, there are cases where deliberate experimentation has been used, and Carrington (1948:198-199) outlines one such pattern used to create 'hybrid' hymnody during the colonial period in Africa:

- (a) teach the correct European tune to African Christians;
- (b) allow them to sing the tune as they wish, altering the different musical intervals and changing the rhythms to suit themselves;



(c) record the result on African lips after a suitable time has elapsed for the changes to become fixed. This will give the form of the tune to be introduced to newcomers and to be taught in schools.

This is more a case of 're-interpretation', or what Herskovits (1941(ii)) calls the easy assimilation of a foreign element that bears some similarity to the existing recipient culture. It is echoed by linguist Elizabeth Tonkin (1971:130) in her study of the developmental process of pidgin languages:

"The concept of mixture is limited to the notion of a base language larded with borrowings. It is too crude to account for the complex process of semantic transformation and syntactic fusion that is likely to occur if one thinks of language primarily in terms of its users".

George List's (1964:20) determination of hybridisation is the meeting and mingling of "two musics of great vitality, producing a recognisably new and equally vital musical style or genre". Ghanaian 'highlife' is one such example, deliberately uniting elements from both western and traditional music systems into a new form "that retains expressive continuity with the traditional music system" (Coplan, 1978:97).

However, in the case of the Sabaot there is relatively little evidence of deliberate hybridisation, although some similarities exist between their traditional music system and the more recent church genres.²⁷ The use of euro-church music remains in demand amongst the Sabaot,²⁸ and perhaps this is the threshold that musicologists such as Kartomi (1981:229) speak of: "Where borrowing ends, creative musical change begins".

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) make the distinction that in languages, borrowing is a slower process than substratum interference as it requires cognitive acceptance prior to any incorporation into an existing language. A musical example of substratum interference is the practice of raising the pitch in succeeding verses as used in American church choruses and hymns. Although increasingly used in Kenyan urban churches, this has yet to be consistently adopted in any Sabaot churches.

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²⁷ Discussed in chapter 8.

²⁸ As in hymns such as *Kiiwamasāāsyāān miisin* (I've wandered far away from God), Appendix II.



Other ideas such as the use of falsetto inserts between phrases in some recent church choruses may either remain or be exchanged for alternative stylistic effects. This constant change movement on a level below that of full integration is known as the Doppler Society syndrome, in which the swift passing of an aspect of change can be compared to, amongst other things, the sound of a car siren approaching and then fading into the distance. The implications for incorporation of traditional song styles into the church are that their adoption into such a context is likely to be a slow process, if indeed it ever rises above substratum level. This is despite being propagated from elements that were once a societal norm.

Different sectors of society respond in different ways and rapid change allows little time for people to first assess the wider implications. When it occurs as a consequence of necessity rather than values (as in the Sabaot switch of lifestyle from cattle rearing to agrarianism), it normally takes considerable time for consolidation and full integration to occur, and given a choice today, many would still return to pastoralism if they could. Now the time available for cultural absorption to take place is being condensed through pressures to adapt and through the wide array of choices. This puts the 'game rules' or the stereotyped behaviour of members under considerable strain.

As recently as the early eighties, musicologists such as Atta Annan Mensah acknowledged the considerable influence of factors such as the church, schooling and media in Africa, yet stated "new musical types of twentieth-century Africa still hold strong links with the old traditional music" (1980:172). If ever the case, such a statement is unlikely to be true for much longer, as amongst the younger Sabaot of today, behaviour patterns learnt as a child, such as never questioning the words of an elder, are now perceived by some as blocks to progress (Foster 1973:23). These in turn lead to a decreased desire to maintain significant links with older music genres.

The current use of selective church styles is also proving a sufficient divergence strategy for its users to justify dissociation from the older forms of Sabaot music. The numbers of users provide the greatest impetus, and are likely to overwhelm those Sabaot who still nurture a desire for other forms of music.

Regardless of the method or speed with which another system comes into the picture, there are those in linguistics who believe that second language acquisition (L2) will always be imperfect and impoverished.²⁹ This is due to the 'mother tongue' (L1) theoretically being the source of the deepest levels of meaning in language acquisition through the psychology of parental relationships and emotional patterns learnt in childhood. Subsequent creative developments which are rooted in primary affinities rather than acquired traits are likely to be more meaningful and create a social sense of security. Some linguists such as Penalosa (1981) no longer support this, arguing that children are more likely to speak in the manner of their peers than their parents. This debate is likely to be one of the deciding factors for future music use amongst the Sabaot.

Another potential deciding factor is that known as 'marker theory'. A study of Mombasa 'insiders' using the *kimvita* variety of Swahili (Russell, 1982) focused on a speech community characterised by rapid socio-cultural change and economic expansion. In assuming that the members relied on each other rather than on an abstract society when using language in their daily interaction, Russell found that women displayed a higher degree of linguistic accommodation than men. She suggested this might be due to their having stronger insider group identity and therefore greater self-confidence in their linguistic behaviour. She also discovered that women were the preservers of identity features or 'markers'.³⁰

In the case of Sabaot women, it is evident that many have become the memory banks of those musical genres to which they have had exposure. This has been confirmed in song workshops where men often consult older women for aspects of ceremonial melodies and text, although the pooling of ideas when memories of certain genres are beginning to blur is another likely explanation. However, the majority of church-goers amongst Sabaot are young people, and owing to the diminishing number of traditional ceremonies, many of these have had limited exposure to non-Christian Sabaot music.

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²⁹ For example, Whinnom, 1980.

³⁰ Also see Kapanga, 1991:90.

If Russell's work is to be applied to the Sabaot musical setting, it would seem that those with the greatest natural affinity for handling markers from traditional genres need to be targeted in the encouragement of further indigenous song development. This will require either more traditional music exponents to enter the church or more young Christians to become familiar with traditional songs. Sub-sections within a people group can exert considerable influence on the larger group by demonstrating strong interest in alternatives, and this may work in favour of any of the music systems currently in use amongst the Sabaot.

In younger people, Russell found that both men and women displayed a greater degree of convergence to the speech of the 'outsider' than older people, again using speech markers to gain social approval and/or to be socially integrated.³¹ There are many correlations with Sabaot music here, particularly in younger people spearheading the introduction of new ideas and identifying more quickly with recent songs and instruments. Signature words such as 'halleluyah' and 'amen' increasingly punctuate the newer church song styles, and use of foreign language song texts is increasing. Different subcategories of the population are using different musical styles to assert their identity,³² and this causes difficulty for older Sabaot or those with little schooling.

"I am entertained by the new tunes, but I have problems with the foreign languages so I turn the radio off for those songs".³³

It seems that new music styles have entered the Sabaot culture relatively unchallenged, coinciding with a time when the status of indigenous music is perceived by younger Sabaot as inferior, old-fashioned and unsuitable for church use. In the church context, this age group is an increasing force for change, but it is not necessarily their assumptions, attitudes, and value judgements that will determine the future use and development of songs. Those older Sabaot who feel that abandoning secular music styles is an inappropriate response by their society could still overrule this, should they choose to do so, but in order for their indigenous music system to survive, all of its owners need the will to continue developing it.

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³¹ The convergence theory of Giles and Powesland (1975).

³² Also refer to Christopher Waterman's research, 1986.

³³ Quote by Chemengu.

## 6.4 Contextualisation issues

The term 'context' is used frequently in this thesis, referring primarily to all that shapes a people's world-view. It is a combination of situational (implying they are immediate and tangible) and structural factors (concerning social organisation and the processes of understanding change) within which beliefs and responses are formulated.

As much of this study relates to the responses of the church to the traditional music of the Sabaot, it is appropriate to begin with a theological definition of contextualisation:

"Communicating the message of the person, works, word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation... and meaningful to respondents in their cultural and existential contexts".³⁴

This process of meaningful communication is therefore based on the belief that all cultures are valid, no matter how different they may seem in comparison with another set of values. It also accepts that the diversity of God's creation is a deliberate choice on his part.

Contextualisation is about seeing things through the eyes of the receiver rather than the initiator. It recognises that the introduction of a hymn such as P.P. Bliss's "When Peace Like a River" may not be an entirely appropriate choice to an African, for whom a river is a source of crocodiles and snakes.³⁵ Songs are also seen by Sabaot as reflections of specific societal interests, and as with much of tribal music in Kenya, it is difficult for these to exist outside the social or cultural setting that may have inspired their creation. There are always exceptions to this, but generally a Sabaot will not sing a Kikuyu song and vice versa.

Those songs that contain some hybridisation will be an exception, and many parts of sub-Saharan Africa are currently using music that displays a fusion of styles and languages. As the urban tide grows, so too does the need to satisfy a more cross-cultural audience, and cultural divides begin to shrink. The comments of Foresythe³⁶ that African music is incomplete until fusion with European music has taken place and

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³⁴ Hesselgrave and Romen, 1989:143.

³⁵ This example provided by Mthethwa, 1989:32.

³⁶ 1940:174-75. See under William Ward (1939) in bibliography.

it reaches "the great concert halls of the world" have never been acceptable, but such denigration is still common amongst many western musicians.

Fusion is the analytical concept of acculturation, or in practical form, the assimilation of features of several cultures. It is also a concept that introduces terms such as 'cross-fertilised' which can imply negativity, along with concepts of mixed breeding and confused liaisons. Nevertheless, the value disparity between juxtaposed cultures has led to several well-known attempts at cultural synthesis of traditional African values and western-orientated values. One of these is David Fanshawe's 'African Sanctus', which was written in the 1970s for choir and orchestra, and overlays sections of the Latin Mass with recorded excerpts of traditional African music and various sounds of nature. It is, however, more an attempt, in Fanshawe's own words (1975:175), to raise awareness of how various music styles can complement each other when "flung together", and focuses on compositional fusion techniques rather than contextualisation.

Other examples include the 'Missa Luba', a mass in Congolese (Zairean) style arranged by Father Guido Haazen, and Pierre Boulez's composition, 'Le Marteau Sans Maître', which was to mark his absorption with African rhythms and modalities. "In the larger view of his 'oeuvre' it is clear that this was a passing exoticism" for Boulez (Poole, 1999:331), unlike Fanshawe who is still using the fusion technique.

It is some time since Wachsmann (1953:57) and Euba (1970:53) proposed experimentation towards a style of composition that would distinctly represent a continuation and natural extension of African cultural heritage. The argument as to what is musically meaningful to the Sabaot today is a fast shifting one, and using older structures as a casing for new concepts may no longer hold any relevance. Part of the problem is that anything traditional is seen as a historic anachronism, whereas "making Christianity traditional does not mean engaging in a culture excavation to resuscitate the Africa of a hundred years before Christianity came".³⁷

It is encouraging therefore, that a composer such as Mang'esoy has reached both young and old by uniting traditional secular Sabaot melodies with Scripture texts. His message for his people is that God can speak perfectly well to them in both

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³⁷ Okullu, 1974:52.

their vernacular and their unique music, and that there is no need to adopt foreign styles. He argues that because the *bukantiit* is already a culturally recognisable vehicle, it is the most convincing method for conveying deep issues such as God's message, but the problem remains that, although this correlation is enjoyed by all who listen to his songs, few musicians are following his lead. Mang'esoy commands considerable respect on the mountain owing to his education and background, but it seems one voice can do little to combat the vast uptake of urban semi-western worship styles.

Music is not the only aspect of culture that benefits from a contextualised approach. For example, rather than turning a blind eye to circumcision, church pastors across Kenya are now seeking alternative routes to adulthood. Amongst the Tharaka people near Meru and Mount Kenya, increasing numbers of young people are opting to attend a period of seclusion that achieve group bonding without the physical pain. After seeing the mental strength required by those undergoing circumcision on Mount Elgon, I can well understand the depth of bonding and pride that such a group experience produces, and whether this can be successfully emulated in less arduous ways remains to be seen.³⁸

In the case of the Sabaot music, neither a total break from former cultural values nor a fixed allegiance to what is familiar appear to be the answer. Both options have created unease within certain sectors of the community, hence Sabaot music faces a number of choices. On the one hand, it may be that the traditional and more recent styles will coexist, but this will require the acceptance and acculturation of new traits, as well as openness in considering the role of traditional style songs in alternative contexts. Some such as Kisinja are already aware of what this will involve:

"The transition of traditional song styles into church settings will be difficult unless these songs are changed and differently motivated".³⁹

On the other hand there could be a blending of the two entities to various extents, ranging from the transfer of discrete musical traits,⁴⁰ to a more definitive act

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³⁸ Amongst the Sabaot, donor agencies have suggested the construction of separate schooling facilities for uncircumcised girls in order to spare them derision.

³⁹ From an interview via interpreter, 25 September 1998.

⁴⁰ Termed 'pseudoethnic' music by ethnomusicologists such as Shiloah and Cohen (1983).



of transculturation. The latter would be the crossing of cultural boundaries by sizeable complexes of culture traits, further defined by Kartomi (1981:244):

"Transculturation occurs only when a group of people select for adoption whole new organising and conceptual or ideological principles... as opposed to small, discrete alien traits".

The hope is that whichever choice prevails, freedom for diversification and subsequent exchange will remain. Amongst the Sabaot there is a growing desire for reformism that combines the benefits of modernisation yet avoids overt westernisation. The latter is certainly desirable but not voiced too openly.

It is also recognised that within their community there are some who prefer *not* to seek change, and who, in their entire lives, have never gone further than the mountain itself. These people live in areas that can only be reached after many hours on foot, and with the exception of listening to a radio, they are sheltered from much that might otherwise cause uncertainty. However, when community issues arise that require a unified response, pressure is applied for them to support the wider group and 'delegations' of concerned members will visit to bring them up to date. Hence, complete rejection of change through insular isolation is becoming a thing of the past.

There are a few difficulties in applying a contextualised approach to music. Firstly, those parts of the cultural psyche of a sub-conscious or instinctive nature may need to be brought to the surface to prevent a generalised interpretation and enable the context to be fully appreciated. Customs considered by church leaders as incompatible with Christianity are not always fully understood before they are rejected and alternatives are put in their place.⁴¹ In the case of Sabaot churches, the repertoire of traditional music has been too easily set aside as inappropriate for use as worship.

Secondly, context of any nature should not be seen as the over-ruling factor. For example, the older forms of Sabaot music were designed for specific cultural roles, but if used in a church context, they must now become subject to the rules of a different setting.

Thirdly, contexts themselves are broadening beyond their original boundaries. Religious music is now performed outside the church in various Sabaot social

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⁴¹ Kraft, 1979:50.

gatherings, just as many traditional songs are transferable between different events, redefining role definitions.

Fourthly, there are no hard and fast assumptions how contextualised songs will work, as, depending on circumstances of use, the communicative value can be perceived differently. On occasions where patriotism has been stirred, such as the Mount Elgon land clashes of 1992, people were more open to cultural reaffirmation and traditional style songs were in great demand. In the combination of more peaceful times and religious settings, a traditional song may stir very different feelings. These range from an appreciative sense of identification to anxiety over possible inappropriate associations with past ways. It is not just the musical vehicle but also the polysemantic nature of the text that generates meaning, as interpretation is linked to the social identities and experiences of their listeners.

Finally, the idea of valuing culture as something that identifies a people group is a lower priority for many young Sabaot than for their elders. Young musicians are keen to explore new styles, and contextualisation often seems unnecessary to them. "The old culture served well but is no longer helpful" is a feeling voiced by many today. Clearly for a continent such as Africa, change and progress are largely synonymous, and attempts to preserve aspects of culture which are now perceived as having diminished value are a low priority.

## **6.5 Sabaot attitudes towards music and change**

Attitudes can be chameleon-like and deceptive. In illustrating this, Edgerton (1971:286-7) cites the Bumetyek, a Bantu group who numbered approximately one thousand in the early 1970s. They have lived in the midst of the Sebei for many generations and appear fully integrated and acculturated through intermarriage, but their responses to survey questions on cultural values have shown significant variance compared to the Sebei. The Bumetyek have 'become' Sebei for reasons of ecological survival, but their depth of commitment to the Sebei culture is in some aspects superficial.

Amongst the Sabaot, internal attitudes towards music may not always be as they appear on the surface. The frequency and intensity with which opinions are

expressed on the use of various music styles is important, and from the numbers attending music workshops, it is clear that Sabaot musicians are seeking wider dialogue on the future of their music. However, it is also possible that the presence of an outside audience such as myself at these workshops may be stimulating an exaggerated response. There is also variation in expressed attitudes depending on whether the response represents an individual or a community. The latter are socially expected to prevail, but the desires of the individual are becoming more pronounced.

Unity, the core value for Sabaot community, is still reflected in many ways, not least the pride they have for their ancestral home, the mountain. Until recently, the prime means of ensuring such bonding in both sexes has been through the rite of circumcision and subsequent observation of age-set obligations. As ceremonial gatherings decline in frequency, there are correspondingly fewer occasions for the fostering of unity. In addition, people are moving further afield in search of farming land, which means public gatherings for discussion of important issues are less common. Age-sets only meet on very important occasions, and the social focus is gradually shifting from *aroosyek* to *kōōto* level (referred to in chapter two). Likewise, marriage through the church is increasingly viewed as a contract between families rather than between their clans.

Unity does not imply that rigid codes of conformity amongst Sabaot individuals are expected. Dress codes on the mountain are relaxed, different styles of houses are increasingly evident, and musical tastes are broadening. Certain community 'norms' are no more than notional, such as the *bukantiit* being played by men only. "I have never met a girl who wanted to learn this, but there is nothing to stop them if they did".⁴²

An increasing number of Sabaot demonstrate willingness to bend their traditions by adapting old institutions to new situations. This does not necessarily mean they have disengaged from their older cultural beliefs,⁴³ but simply that they recognise the pressure of change. Just as the Bumetyek adopted some of the customs of those they came into repeated contact with, so the Sabaot have demonstrated this

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⁴² Interview with Chemunui, December 1998.

⁴³ Tingey (1994:227) notes a similar response amongst the Damāi musicians of Nepal.

in their successful adaptation of farming techniques. They are not so tolerant, however, of linguistic deviations, although this may have arisen due to heightened awareness of the Bible translation and literacy programmes in their midst. They have also shown considerable resilience towards impinging cultural invasion if it is deemed not to be in the interest of the community (as in the case of the 1992 land clashes).

What is difficult to ascertain is how deeply recent music has penetrated the 'world view' of these people. Judging by the following quote it is still at the stage of accommodation rather than acculturation and on the periphery of their culture despite considerable use. It is an exterior song and dance that deflects from the true picture, an ambivalence towards newer styles born of perceived advantage, or doing as other churches do elsewhere in the country:

"The Church crusade meetings that are now coming to the mountain are bringing new styles - we don't understand them, but we copy anyway. We have a saying for such a situation: 'You can't push a big man out, but you can walk beside him' ".⁴⁴

For those that long to return to life as it once was, the prognosis depends on the overlay factor (see 6.2.1), although Herskovits paints a more daunting picture:

"The clock of cultural change cannot be turned backward. Acculturation, once achieved, makes impossible the return to a prior mode of life, no matter how glowingly envisioned under social deprivation".⁴⁵

It is possible that the interests of unity mean that conflicting attitudes within different layers of the community can remain muted until it is too late for dissent to be of significance. Sabaot prefer to help each other rather than compete, hence one will give way more readily to the other. Regarding the dissent felt but not voiced over church songs, people may be sensing that because such styles have been employed within group contexts for some time, they are now a fully adopted part of Sabaot life.⁴⁶

Alternatively, the insidiousness of musical shift makes the implications difficult to detect amongst those affected, particularly as there is an inherent sense of curiosity in every human being that refuses to be curbed. Once the initial curiosity is assuaged,

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⁴⁴ Interview with Kisinja, 25 September 1998.

⁴⁵ Herskovits, 1962:223-4.

⁴⁶ Theory of Kotter, 1996:155-6.

the Sabaot need a reason for continuing to take on board something that is new or strange. This was demonstrated in a composition workshop (1997), where the group were unanimous that they did not want to learn the rudiments of the *sofège* musical notation system because they saw no need for it: "our songs are always sung from memory".

In seeking Sabaot opinions on many different aspects of change impacting their lives, a considerable range of answers has been collated. I have realised during the writing of this that the positive quotes recorded here are in the minority, and stress that in no way should this be taken as conveying the balance of opinion. Numerical surveys were not conducted, only conversational interaction in one-to-one and group settings. I also make no apology for using a large number of quotes in these next sections as they present a candid and unedited review of feelings.

Most Sabaot see change as worthwhile, particularly if it brings something they want, such as education, family planning and improved farming techniques. Modernisation is considered desirable and necessary, but in discussing what forms this could take, it seems many Sabaot equate 'modern' with the achievements of the West. However, as Huntington puts it, "the West was the West long before it was modern" (1996:69). Of a more practical nature, when Kororio is asked what he would do differently if given another fifty years of life,⁴⁷ he immediately says:

"Right now I would extend my land, build a better house, buy a vehicle and go to live in a city. I have never been to Bungoma, Eldoret or Nairobi, only to Kitale and Kakamega".

Favourable feelings towards the incoming church song styles are more common amongst the younger Sabaot, a typical response being "When I left traditional songs it was like getting out of the darkness spiritually". For the older members, there are few positives expressed concerning these song styles, but more interest in the instruments. *Bukantiit* exponents Kinyokye and Chelasia both said in interviews that they had no intention of ever learning a guitar, but confessed to liking its sound. Kisinja, on the other hand, prefers the *bukantiit*:

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⁴⁷ At the time of writing this, Kororio is considered to be the oldest man on the mountain.



"We will never completely abandon the *bukantiit* or use the guitar for traditional ceremonies, but I like the younger *bukantiit* players because they convey Christianity".

However, the feelings towards outside influences are not always positive. G.S. Snell (1954:91) noted some fifty years ago how the Kalenjin Nandi felt changes implemented to their local legal system were disruptive and divisive. Amongst the Sabaot, there is discomfort when pronouncements of any nature are delivered to them without proper consultation. For example, the Police Inspector of Kapsokwony announced in August 2000 that anyone who circumcised girls would be prosecuted. The response to this by a Sabaot elder was that:

"The Sabaot will continue defending female genital mutilation because of the gifts parents receive when the first daughter is circumcised. Girls demand to be circumcised in order to be accepted as mature women by the community".⁴⁸

On the dilution of cultural ways there are regrets:

"Our *Mosoobiisyēk* were original. Now they are like everyone else, with intermarriage, schooling and movement away from their homesteads due to farming. Instead of fruit, meat and honey, they eat *ugali* (maize)".⁴⁹

It is considered bad to ape city dweller mannerisms, and such people are called 'city man' or 'lost one'. Others mutter, "Whose son is he?" A person who walks around carrying a boom-box or cassette player under their arm is construed as spending money on useless things, whilst those who use hospitals for circumcision are considered cowards. Breaking honoured ways of doing other things is also frowned upon:

"Twenty years ago the newly circumcised were not allowed to interact with their parents for a considerable time afterwards, but nowadays you can see them roaming the market place the day after the cutting!"⁵⁰

Concerning the new music styles, a common comment from older Sabaot is "What are they singing now?" Mang'esoy refers to *tyēēntaab kēny* as 'real music',

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⁴⁸ As reported in the *Daily Nation*, 15 August, 2000. Refers to the practice of a father receiving a cow from each of his age mates when his first daughter is circumcised, whereas there are no material gains when other daughters in the family undergo the rite. The Sabaot speak of 'female circumcision' rather than 'genital mutilation', although the latter is used by some medical clinics and aid agencies on Mount Elgon to link with national publicity awareness publications.

⁴⁹ Christopher Kiplang'at.

⁵⁰ William Beo Chemengu.



leaving little doubt which he prefers.⁵¹ Elders shake their heads and say:

"These new songs are breaking us up, coming in between parents and children, young and old. Our children are lost, these new styles are rotting our culture".

The usurping of the *bukantiit* by the "foreign" guitar is seen as a breach of traditions.

In some cases, the intensity of feelings verges on bewilderment and despair:

"The role of music is becoming useless today, far less important than in the time of my father".⁵²

Language use is also causing comment:

"The effect of using Swahili on the congregation is that they appear to be listening but they are in fact sleeping! If a pastor uses Sabaot, that says to us 'You are now a person'." ⁵³

Another concern is the lack of participation during singing and the weak messages of song texts:

"We used to sing understandable songs, but nowadays they are strange. Everybody, the young, the old, both men and women could join in and dance, but now the new songs are meaningless. The parts that everyone can sing have useless words and only the solos are worth listening to. *Our* songs were better".⁵⁴

Vocalised commentaries on social issues such as security problems, elopement, cattle or moralistic teaching are being replaced by other topics:

"It is true that today the issues are changing for us, but these newer songs sing about love, and are not for me!"⁵⁵

It is possible some musicians are reluctant to move into the realm of guitars and newer music because they do not want to appear out-performed in performance skills, but this is not easy to ascertain. What *is* clear is that amongst older Sabaot, there is a near unanimous decrying of the changes their youth are adopting, along with considerable reluctance to take any steps to counter these. Foster (1973:85) believes fatalism is inevitable in such situations, and Bartók's prognosis of Hungarian folk music was equally fatalistic: sooner or later, new melodies would completely oust the old (Suchoff, 1997:164).

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⁵¹ Personal communication, 7 October 2001. See Table 4a, chapter 4.1.

⁵² Andrea Ndiwa, interviewed December 1998.

⁵³ William Chelasia.

⁵⁴ Kororio.

⁵⁵ Kisinja.

Reasons are offered as to why the problem has arisen amongst the Sabaot:

"Our music is changing today because long ago the elders played *bukantiit* in the evening hours, but now the young men want to play music at seven in the morning. They are confused! These new church songs are not good, because they make our youth prefer dancing to working in the *shamba*".⁵⁶

Also:

"Change is bad, it is violating what God has created. But if the youth want change, they still have a choice. He who feels like listening to that city music will do it".⁵⁷

Opinions as to whether the perceived benefits of progress will eventually swing opinion in favour of new song styles are mixed:

"Our good old ways are disappearing like our cows. Some cows like roaming and not eating properly. If our ways returned as a proper cow should do, things would be better. We are changing too fast, we need rewinding".⁵⁸

But when given the chance to suggest other options, Kororio lists material things that equate with a 'better life', and no amount of questioning elicits any practical ideas as to how to address the loss of the "good old ways".



Plate 6a: Kororio arap Chesabir

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⁵⁶ Andrea Ndiwa.

⁵⁷ Hilary J.C. Tirob.

⁵⁸ Kororio.

The majority of older Sabaot hope their traditional music will be passed to future generations, but at the same time realise that new forms of music cannot be prevented from being widely taken up.

"The church is the growing influence. There are so many songs being translated now from Swahili or English to Sabaot, and our young learn these at school whilst pastors interact on seminars or with other tribes and also bring new songs".⁵⁹

"I don't think the whites have caused much change here on the mountain, except to bring us Christianity and a wider choice of crops. Before and during the colonial Government, our culture was still intact and I preferred life then. We could move to and from Uganda with no problems, but now this is difficult and the Kenyan Government is bringing in people like the Bukusu to erode our culture. Life also used to be better for women, despite the hardships, but now there are problems due to intermarriage and women not respecting their husbands. Our people are leaving their old ways because of schooling, church and interaction".⁶⁰

For some, either middle ground or capitulation are the only remaining choices:

"I respect the *bukantiit*, whilst those who play the guitar respect that".⁶¹

"I didn't want to make a complete break with traditional music, but I had Christian commitments and those who attend traditional ceremonies are considered backsliders".⁶²

Others are torn because they see that education has compounded the problem yet is essential for the future. The Sabaot face crossroads in every way possible.

"People's minds are turning towards education and modern ways. The younger Sabaot prefer the guitar to the *bukantiit* as this equates with the image of modern man, but the older men still remain with the *bukantiit* as they feel this helps them compose the Sabaot sound. The guitar forces a pitch that is not in Sabaot music. Yet how does a young person know today what is good? We need more teaching to explain these changes".⁶³

In conclusion, the range of feelings amongst the Sabaot towards music use is considerable, but no more than can be expected from a society that is adjusting to new ideals and cultural pressures. The desire to further develop traditional genres remains alive amongst the older Sabaot men, but the disparity between their verbalisation and action encourages the majority of women and young people to continue exploring

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⁵⁹ Joseph Morongo.

⁶⁰ Chemunui.

⁶¹ Kisinja.

⁶² Bernard Chuma Mulunda.

⁶³ Kiboki Kigai.

alternative styles. Whether raising awareness of this imbalance will make any significant impact in Sabaoth music development will be explored during the section on song workshops in chapter eight.

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## CHAPTER 7: LINGUISTIC PARALLELS

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*Kāwootoowu tyoonkōōchēēt...*

I am beginning a story...

Sabaot song

### 7.1 Language and music: a partnership confused

The purpose for this chapter on song text material is to examine features of Sabaot traditional song texts, and to comment on problems that are becoming apparent in more recent song text usage. Most of the correlations between existing language-shift theories and music use relate to cultural issues, so have been considered in chapter 6.3 rather than here. Sabaot mother tongue speakers skilled in song composition have assisted in the evaluation, along with some whose training is more in linguistics.

Difficulties in the matching of words and music have existed in the Kenyan context since early European missionaries introduced church liturgy and hymnody to the African church. The majority of their hymns were taught in English, and of those translated into another language, Swahili was considered preferable to using vernaculars as missionaries believed it to be widely and sufficiently understood throughout Kenya. The implications of second or third-language intelligibility were not considered, nor was there any awareness of the need for matching specific language features with melodic counterparts.

Consequently, many hymns were translated by substituting Swahili words with the same number of syllables as corresponding English words, and retaining the original European melody and rhythm.¹ It was known that word order was the same for English and Swahili (SVO or subject-verb-object), but other aspects such as tone and song structure were largely ignored.

English	He ate meat	SVO
Swahili	<i>Alikula nyama</i>	SVO
Sabaot	<i>Kyaam bēēnyto</i>	VSO (Ate he meat)

Syllabic stress in words is another aspect that was seldom considered. An example of this can be found in the hymn "We praise thee O God", published in the Swahili

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¹ Musumba (1992) highlights this and other problems in her thesis.

hymnal *Tenzi za Rohoni* (1986) where it is translated as "*Twamsifu Mungu*". The penultimate syllable stress rule of Swahili should result in the following pattern: ²

*Twamsifu Mungu kwa Mwana wa pendo,*  
*Aliyetufia na kupaa juu.*

When overlaid on a melody that was first designed for the metre and syllabic stress organisation of English words, the Swahili version becomes distorted:

We | praise thee O | God, for the | Son of Thy | love,  
 Twam- | si fu Mu- | ngu kwa Mwa- | na wa pe- | ndo,

For | Je- sus who | died and is | now gone a- | bove.  
 A- | li- ye- tu- | fi- a na | ku- pa- a | juu.

Similar examples of incorrect stress occur so frequently in translated church songs that this is now considered an acceptable practice, even amongst singers who are fluent Swahili speakers. It could be argued that such errors are insignificant examples of language misuse as they create a subtle tension between syllabic accent and the metre that improves the song.³ Redundant lexical tone in Swahili makes it more accommodating of mistreatment, and it also holds second-language status for many Kenyans so is less well spoken by some. What is more disturbing is that such accommodation can now be found in first language use.

Sabaot music is not alone in exemplifying this. In a study of Roman Catholic church music in Uganda, Catherine Gray (1995:140-141) finds a tolerance of linguistic errors, giving a Luganda hymn as illustration. *Wesimye leero naye'* means 'you are blessed', but when it is fitted to a western hymn tune, the first syllable is lengthened to fit the given rhythm: '*wēsimye leero naye'* now means 'you are dug up'. The Baganda are fully aware of the mistake, but retain it because they are used to singing it this way.

Blacking also found in his study of Venda music that distortion of speech-tone patterns remained unchallenged. "They accepted my performance as truly Venda even if I deliberately sang out of tune" (Byron, 1995:65). Although I do not know the extent of the aberration in Blacking's performance, my assumption is it included changes in relative pitch since Blacking's comments are made in a speech-tone

² Example kindly supplied by Kagame Gichuhi (1997:3). See Appendix II for partial transcription.

³ Lord observes a similar tension in Serbocroatian Heroic Songs, 2000:37.



context. Blacking concluded from his experiment that the influence of words in Venda compositions was less important than elsewhere in Africa, but in all probability he was experiencing a cultural gesture from his hosts that is common in many parts of Africa. Despite his two years of fieldwork amongst the Venda people, Blacking would still have been considered an 'outsider' in their eyes. It is highly unlikely they would have openly criticised the attempts of a guest to sing Venda songs, let alone cause him to lose face by pointing out corrections.

In the case of the Sabaot, the presence of the Bible Translation and Literacy project (SBTL) on the mountain has heightened community awareness both as to the communicative relevance of their mother tongue and the importance of defining acceptable patterns of usage. The translators return to their homes in the evenings and discuss with friends the progress that is being made, describing the constant checking and re-checking that is involved in determining accurate choice of text. The written draft copies that are distributed through the area for people to edit also help draw the community into the process.

In the song composition workshops, participants have likewise been encouraged to correct one another in a group setting to raise greater awareness of texts needing to be grammatically accurate. But with the best of intent, young composers appear to have insufficient exposure to techniques that should have been passed down from their fathers, and without correction, they settle for similar errors to those observed by Gray. Mis-alignment of long and short vowels with complementary note lengths, and mismatching of lexical tone with melodic contour can be found in recent Sabaot songs, and only when a respected mother tongue speaker points them out does discussion and amendment occur. Assuming that mother tongue speakers are aware when their language is being carelessly handled in this way, the question arises why this continues to happen.

There appear to be no social strata influencing the right to make decisions on correct language usage, and several of the translators on the SBTL team are relatively young. It is clear that the ability to speak the mother tongue ranks high in the hierarchy or cline of Sabaot language values, supported by its wide use across the mountain. The translation programme gives additional status to the language, and also

clarifies how the various linguistic components function, but it does not cast the language into stone. Instead, it acknowledges Sabaot to be a flexible language, capable of meeting the requirements of a changing world.

Music brings additional challenges through its intimate partnership with tonal languages. Change one and it is highly likely that the other must change too. Perhaps all this is too much for the inexperienced composer to be fully aware of at first, hence the indecision over evaluation. As people familiarise themselves with new sounds, it is not that they are unaware of the difference between right and wrong, but that they are accepting of imbalances. Repetition of errors clearly lessens the likelihood of challenge, but there is still the possibility of this at a later date when people have had time to digest the uncertainties.

It goes without saying that the prerequisite for an effective partnership between music and text is that exponents have a deep-level understanding of the emic nature of both. The majority of Sabaot will still say of the *bukantiit*, "that is our instrument", but birthright familiarity does not ensure a person knows the correct way of handling it. The gulf between identifying-with and actual use is growing wider, which means that the emic view is also shifting. Until relatively recently, the Sabaot relied more on orality than written transmission of their language, and this has meant that for most, understanding how their language works is largely drawn from the process of daily speech. With this sort of background, it is hardly surprising that knowledge of traditional music styles is declining as these songs gradually recede from daily life.

The new generation of Sabaot composers is considerably challenged by trends emanating from urban centres. One such is the mixing of vocabulary and grammar from several languages to create the popular slang known as *sheng*. In addition to experimenting with this, users of the Sabaot language are also creating new words by borrowing roots of Swahili words and adding a 'Sabaot-like' suffix. Examples of this 'Swahili mix' include:

<u>Sabaot</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>mutukeet</i>	motor car (Swahili ' <i>gari</i> ' or ' <i>motaka</i> ')
<i>meeseet</i>	table (from Swahili ' <i>mesa</i> ')

Whereas traditional Sabaot songs only used the Sabaot language, now singers are increasingly mixing Sabaot and Swahili in the same song, in much the same way as urban dwellers constantly switch between Swahili and English in their conversational sentences.

SBTL translators avoid bringing in borrowed words where no suitable word already exists in the mother tongue. Although the language does not lend itself to compounding descriptive words such as 'walking stick', it is acceptable to take a word that has some relationship to the new idea, and then extend the meaning to include a new sense. This is why the word for 'boat' is the same as 'bee-hive', as both are made from a hollow piece of wood that can float on water. Another example is *tariiteet*, meaning either bird or aeroplane depending on the context.⁴ Descriptive words such as *burburyoontēēt* (fish) can be 'invented' by the verb that conveys a wiggling motion in water becoming a noun, so that a 'wiggler' is now a fish.⁵

The common use of Swahili has also brought letters that are not part of the existing Sabaot orthography. For example, the letter *f* is not in the Sabaot consonant list but can be found in Swahili-derived words such as *fuuntiit* (craftsman) and *faraasiit* (horse), both now recognised in the Sabaot Dictionary (1996). The fact that Sabaot has long and heavy vowels, tone, and a different orthography to that of Swahili does not appear to check Sabaot speakers from borrowing Swahili words in everyday speech.

As words are added to the language, their inclusion in songs increases the likelihood of their being accepted into common use. Churches often worship outdoors or in buildings with open windows, and passive listeners are impacted over considerable distances when songs are sung. This is further helped by the habit of Sabaot singers repeating songs many times in performance. Living in close proximity leads to unification and it is hardly surprising that other churches soon adopt these

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⁴ Swahili does the same in this instance (*ndege*).

same songs. Thus dissemination of song vocabulary occurs at a rate that is likely to be faster than would occur by means of everyday speech in a non-churched rural area. The risks of misuse are great, but must be weighed against the benefits of linguistic growth and vitality that result from a language being actively used.

If either component (text or music) demonstrates a greater rate of changeability than the other can accommodate, it might be expected that they would eventually go their separate ways. It has already been noted that in Sabaot churches, some people cease to sing during Swahili songs, plainly reluctant to entertain both a new song style and a language that is not fully theirs. At what point in time they decide to become more open has not been determined, but there is always the probability that no sooner does this happen than the style will change again. One such challenge is already on the way, with Christian musicians bringing the first rap recordings to the Kenyan market. The rap song style is proving highly popular, and the reason is changeability itself. Such songs have a structure that allows the 'rapper' considerable freedom to add and extend phrases whilst exploring new vocabulary, and the more innovative, the better. Although there are no signs of it yet on the slopes, I have heard children in Kimilili applying rap techniques to the Sabaot language.

## 7.2 Properties of the Sabaot language

Much has been written on the Sabaot language, but a brief summary of the main phonological features as used in song texts is helpful in considering the relationship between word and music.⁶

The Sabaot language has thirteen consonants, namely *b, ch, k, l, m, n, ny, ng', r, s, t, w, y*. The letter *b* is used instead of *p*, and *t* is used instead of *d*. Unlike Swahili, there is no *j, h, f, gh, th* or *dh*.

The vowel system of Sabaot is more complicated, with sixteen phonemic vowel sounds based on a system of five basic vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*). When the orthography for Sabaot was being devised, the apparent variation within these five

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⁵ Personal communication from Iver Larsen, 7 February 1998. Occurs, for example, in the Book of Mark 1:16f.

⁶ Most of the following reference material has been drawn from publications by Larsen, Leonard, Mang'esoy and associated authors (see Bibliography).

sounds caused problems for linguists. It was not until they asked a mother tongue speaker to sing the words that it was perceived the language had two vowel families: the 'light' (normal) and the 'heavy' (produced by a phonological device called 'Advanced Tongue Toot' or +ATR).⁷ To show the distinction in tone between these devices, it was decided to mark the 'heavy' or +ATR vowels with lines over them. For example:

<i>teeb</i>	<i>vt.</i> to ask (medium rising tone)
<i>tēēb</i>	<i>vi.</i> to insert, place, put somewhere (low falling tone)

It was also found that the length of a vowel made a difference to meaning, hence each of the five basic vowels could be written as short (single letter as in *o*) or long (double letters as in *oo*). For example:

<i>karam</i>	she fetched water ( <i>ram</i> – <i>vt.</i> draw water)
<i>karaam</i>	<i>adj.</i> good
<i>kaaram</i>	I fetched water
<i>kaaraam</i>	<i>n.</i> wasp (shortened version of <i>kaaraamnyaanteet</i> )

Within the two main Sabaot dialects of *Book* and *Koony*, there are several phonological and lexical differences, but nowadays it is almost impossible to find a 'pure' *Koony* speaker on Mount Elgon owing to the high degree of social intermixing. Basic differences can be shown in the following use of *n* with *l*, and *r* with *l*:

<u><i>Koony</i> dialect</u>	<u><i>Book</i> dialect</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>leekweet</i>	<i>neekweet</i>	child
<i>kule</i>	<i>kini</i>	that
<i>mēliilto</i>	<i>mēriinto</i>	leopard
<i>lēēl</i>	<i>rēēn</i>	white

It can be assumed from this that the *Book* dialect has lost the consonant *l* with the exception of a few recent loan words such as *sibitaali* ('hospital'). According to Larsen (1985), the short, light vowel *e* has also disappeared except in word-final position. There is some swallowing of end syllables, as shown in the following:

<u><i>Koony</i> dialect</u>	<u><i>Book</i> dialect</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>Kas nyoo</i>	<i>Kasaa nyoo</i>	See that one!

In addition, words can be shortened, and although this is not necessarily dialectal, it

⁷ In phonological phenomena, the position of the tongue root and body in the mouth cavity can be either relatively advanced/ raised (+ATR) or retracted/lowered (-ATR) in the production of certain classes of sounds.



is a device commonly used in song texts:

<i>keetit</i>	stick
<i>keet</i>	stick
<i>bēēlyoontēēt</i>	elephant
<i>bēēl</i>	elephant

People may also use a different dialect outside their home setting, or when mixing with their own age-set. At present the dialects are still maintained by being passed down through families or prolonged through parental influence, but in time, interaction is likely to even this out. Dialects also spread and merge with people movement, which is increasing as the mountain tracks become more passable. Due to the decision to use the *Koony* dialect for the translation of the Bible, various other publications such as the Sabaot Dictionary (1996) are raising the profile of this dialect and it is also used in the primary schools for mother tongue education.



Minimal pronunciation differences exist between each of the subdialects of *Koony* and *Book*. For example, in comparing *Koony* and *Mosoob*:

<u><i>Koony</i></u>	<u><i>Mosoob</i></u>	<u><i>Swahili</i></u>	<u><i>English</i></u>
<i>kimnyēēt</i>	<i>kumnyēēt</i>	<i>ugali</i>	maize meal

A complete analysis of tone rules in the Sabaot language is as yet incomplete, but there are known to be two main functions of tone:

(i) *Lexical*

At lexical or word level, Sabaot has three basic tones: high, mid and low. However, very few words are distinguished solely by lexical tone, and mother tongue speakers are accustomed to inferring the meaning from the context. For this reason, the Sabaot orthography committee decided that lexical tone differences would not be marked, although it is easy for newcomers to the language to confuse lexical tone with heavy and light vowels. Examples of word pairs which have the same letters but require different tone in order to distinguish meaning are:⁸

 mōkōōnkēēt (MMH)	hoe
 mōkōōnkēēt (LMRising)	sisal

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⁸ The tone markings are only for the reader's guidance.



	sooyeet (MRising)	blowpipe
	sooyeet (LM)	buffalo
	makaankeet (MHH)	cooking stick
	makaankeet (LLRising)	guinea fowl



## (ii) Grammatical

Grammatical tone is very important in the Sabaot language, and a number of markings are used in the orthography to indicate the occurrence of this. Almost any sentence that includes a tone mark can mean something else if the tone marker is left out. Rather than placing conventional tone marks for high, mid or low tones above each syllable of a word, it was decided that the symbols commonly found on the typewriter such as + - : ' / would be placed in front of the word in question. For example, the colon marking is used to indicate subject:

*Kāmwoochi kwaan* He told his father (rising tone at end, *kwaan* is object)  
*Kāmwoochi : kwaan* His father told him (falling tone at end, : *kwaan* is subject)

Tone and text markers are also used to distinguish between negatives, second and third person verbs, and emphatic and non-emphatic forms.

Indefinite subject:

 *Kikeecham siriisyēēt* (LMM LLRising) We liked the writing  
 */Kikeecham siriisyēēt* (LLH LLRising) The writing was liked

Positive and negative forms:

+ *Māāmwoowook* (HLL) I will tell you  
- *Māāmwoowook* (MMM) I will not tell you.

Specific second person 'you' marker:

<i>Kēēsuus āmiik</i> (HLH)	You fried the food
<i>Kēēsuus āmiik</i> (LLH)	He/she/they fried the food

Emphasis:

<i>Kaakas</i> (LL)	I saw it/him
<i>!Kaakas</i> (HL)	I really did see it/him

### 7.3 A closer examination of traditional song texts

The text is considered the most important aspect of a traditional Sabaot song,⁹ and the subject matter of ceremonial songs such as *chōōlyēēt*, *sēēryēēt*, *sōōsyoo* and *Mānyirōōr* is largely familiar to those who have attended such ceremonies. During performance, some personalisation of names and events is expected according to the circumstances, and there is also freedom to add recent topical comments. Songs commemorating marriage and the birth of twins are expected to have attributes of the various families skilfully woven into the song text, and sung narratives to have the same freedom as any story-teller, providing both entertainment and historical teaching.

An excerpt from *Mānyirōōr*, a narrative sung by Kisinja¹⁰ (each line is interspersed with *bukantiit* playing):

*Kāwootoowu tyoonkōōchēēt*  
I am beginning a story  
*nyi kibo Mānyirōōr.*  
that of [about] *Mānyirōōr*.  
*Chēēnēē Mānyirōōr kaab chumbe,*  
*Mānyirōōr* at the *wazungu's* [foreigner's] place,  
*mākōōkuchō Mānyirōōr,*  
*Mānyirōōr* will come,  
*mākuchōōnēē kaab chumbe,*  
he will come from the place of the *wazungu*,  
*chōōntōōy maataab lāsyōōmbē,*  
he will come with a device that has fire,  
*mākōōkuchō Mānyirōōr.*  
*Mānyirōōr* will come.

⁹ "Words are more important than the music", quote by William Beo Chemengu.

¹⁰ Song 40A:2-245, Appendix II, CD:18.

*Chōōntooy chēēblēēl kērēbēēt,*

He comes with the one wearing a white basket [hat],  
*chōōntooy chēēblēēl kērēbēēt,*

he comes with the one wearing a white basket [hat],  
*mākōōkuchō Mānyirōōr.*

Indeed *Mānyirōōr* has come,  
*mākookubuu Nkachi kaa,*

he has arrived at his home of Nkachi,  
*kunyoowoon kuriirtoos lēēkooy,*  
therefore no more crying of the people/children,

*Bērē wo kubun Nkachi kaa,*  
When he arrived at Nkachi,

*nto bērē wookubuu nkachi kaa,*  
and when he arrived at Nkachi, our home,  
*kunyoowoon kuriirtoos lēēkooy.*

he found the children crying.

*Riirtōōs lēēkook kwiimēn,*

Crying the whole day,

*ānkuriirtōōs kuyyeech.*

and crying the whole night.

This song continues for some considerable time, and it is evident from the layout that the subject material can venture down many side-alleys before the conclusion is eventually reached.

*Mēliilto* ritual song texts remind the participants of the secretiveness behind the initiation event that has just taken place:

We are attacking the leopard but don't tell it out;  
Look after the leopard for you shouldn't see it;  
Look after the leopard for no man should see it;  
Look after this fanged one that no man may see;  
Guard the side of the animal that no man can see it;  
Guard the animal that no man can steal it.¹¹

The *ng'ētunyto* or 'lion' song is similar,¹² but to ensure even greater secrecy, the singer may use only veiled reference to the type of animal:

*Chēēbkirib ēē,*

Oh person guarding,

*ōriibkēēch ēē :tyoong'yoo ēē,*

look after our animal, ee,

*ōriibkēēch ēē kimase ēē'*

look after the one with the mane.

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¹¹ Words given by Goldschmidt, 1986:107.

¹² Songs 44A:1-7; 44A:39-52 (CD:8).

Another song associated with the *mēliilto* event reminds the initiates to remember and appreciate the Mount Elgon moorlands for their grazing pastures, peace, rain, rivers and caves with salt-licks:¹³

*Ōō ntēekwēyiit ēē, kaang'alaal mēēruunēēt, wōy baabaay,*  
 The leg jingles [iron rings] are talking, my father,  
*Ntēekwēyiit wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit ēē,*  
 the leg jingles, my mother, the leg jingles,  
*Kēēbkoonēē tulwo tuuy, wōy baabaay,*  
 we come from a mountain which/that is dark, my father,  
*Ntēekwēyiit, ēē wōy ēē ntēekwoob Cheeseekuut,*  
 leg jingles, ee woy ee, Chesekut's leg jingles,  
*Ōō wēē kēēbkoonēē Marikiis wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit wē moomoo,*  
 Oo we come from the river *Marikiis* [Malakis], the leg jingles, my mother,  
*Rootunēē chēēbtōōtōōn wōy moomoo, ntēekwēyiit wē moomoo.*  
 They [cattle] come from *Chēēbtōōtōōn* [salty cave], the leg jingles, my mother.  
*Chēēbtootōōn mariich tany, wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit, wē baabaay,*  
 It is a narrow way for a cow to pass through, my mother, the leg jingles, my father,  
*wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit, bo biiko masiit keey,*  
 my mother, these people of *masiit keey*,¹⁴  
*wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit Cheeseekuut,*  
 my mother, Chesekut's leg jingles,  
*Kēēbkoonēē acheek teeng'an keet, wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit wē baabaay,*  
 We come from where the land of small trees, my mother, the leg jingles, my father,  
*kiitankas sisimto wē moomoo, ntēekwēyiit ēē, wōy ēē ntēekwēyiit wē moomoo.*  
 where the *sisimto* tree is at peace [tranquil], the leg jingles, my mother.

A detailed study of song meanings and imagery is not attempted within the restrictions of this research as texts often have metaphorical applications that not even a fluent mother tongue speaker necessarily understands. Judging by the difficulty I have encountered in eliciting meanings for a sample of song texts, the number of people with this level of knowledge is diminishing. It is no easy task to interpret metaphorical equivalents across language barriers, and the Sabaot love of riddles makes this even harder. A singer might discuss one line of a song for some

¹³ Song 44A:7-38. *Ntēekwēyiit* are the iron leg bangles worn by women for dancing.

¹⁴ *Masiit keey* now means 'indigenous peoples' but according to Kipsisei, its literal meaning is 'those who do not wash daily' (because the mountain is a cold place). Many Sabaot would consider this term to be derogatory today.

twenty minutes with Stanley Ndiema (my interpreter for much of this work) only for them both to announce "the meaning is lost". This is particularly the case with songs that refer to events that are long past, and where only the broadest of meanings can now be gained.

As would be expected in a traditional song genre that has many different community applications, there is more than one musical structural pattern or form, and this has a corresponding effect on text patterns. The two main categories are songs that alternate between a solo singer plus response group, and songs which are considered complete with a single voice.

The alternation between solo and group or call and response is common to many Sabaoth songs and broad patterns emerge in the text. Often the solo voice will enter with the first line of the stanza, reminding the nearby singers of the response section to come. If a *bukantiit* is used, there will be an instrumental version of the entire melody before the first entry of the solo voice, and this may reoccur at other points such as after a block of stanzas. The group then sings the second line of the stanza, followed by short alternating entries between group and solo.

*Chēēmoomo Song*¹⁵

Solo voice: *Ōkuur chēēmoomo ēē*, (Call for the mother of the circumcision candidates to come and bless her children)

Group: *ōkuur chēēmoomo ēē*,  
*wōōy ēē ōō*, [vocables]

Solo: *wōōy ēē ōō*

Group: *wōōy ēē ōō*

Solo: *wōōy ēē ōō*

Group: *wōōy ēē ōō- ēē ōō*.

Once this entire alternating response section is established to the satisfaction of the solo singer, he or she then begins to develop the story line in a series of short sung phrases, each of which can either alternate with a group response or a solo phrase on the *bukantiit*. If an instrument is used, eventually there comes a point of rest during which the instrument repeats the opening melody perhaps with a section of variations. After this the process of solo voice, instrument and group interaction

¹⁵ Song 44A:82-102, CD:3.

starts again, continuing in this fashion for as long as the solo singer deems necessary to cover the topic in full.

Some songs are more group orientated, particularly the Warrior category which demands greater involvement to raise morale before a raid. Of the several responses in a song, one is much longer than the others, and the soloist interjects phrases to keep the rhythm of the song flowing much as a *bukantiit* would do.

#### *Kimoru Warrior Song*¹⁶

- Solo voice: *Woyye Kimoru ēē*, (Oh dear, Kimoru, yes,  
*wōy ēē aa Kimoru ēē*. (Oh dear, yes, Kimoru, yes.)
- Group: *Kiikubar baabaa anii kiriinkeetaab kitooch ēē*  
 (My father crushed the stronghold of the *Kitooch*)¹⁷
- Solo: *wōy ēē*
- Group: *Kōōrōōbēr ng'ōō* (Who came to wind it up?)
- Solo: *wōy ēē*
- Group: *Kōōrōōbēr Kimoru ēē* (Kimoru wound it up, yes)
- Solo: *ōō wē*
- Group: *āā*
- Solo: *Kēēng'alal* (Let's proclaim it)
- Group: *Kiikubar baabaa kiriinkēētāāb kitooch ēē*  
 (My father crushed the stronghold of the *Kitooch*, yes)
- Solo: *wōy āā*
- Group: *Kōōrōōbēr Kimoru ēē*. (Kimoru wound it up, yes).

In traditional songs, and also those more recent church compositions by Mang'esoy and Bernard Chuma which are based on traditional structures, the use of call and response has three common patterns:

(i) the soloist sings a phrase that can vary melodically and rhythmically with each rendering, before the group responds with a phrase that uses the same melody and text. The number of pulses given to the respective call and response sections is variable. For the purposes of this study, pulse is defined as a series of regular beats or articulations that run throughout a song regardless of metrical or phrase groupings.¹⁸ When phrase divisions occur, their pattern is revealed to some extent by the alternation of call and response entries, but there is little predictability as to actual lengths for each part. For example, in the *sēērēērwo* song from the *sōōsyoo* marriage

¹⁶ Song 41A:72-113.

¹⁷ A Bantu tribe.

¹⁸ London (*NGDMM* 20:599) adds that "the sense of pulse arises through the listener's cognitive and kinaesthetic response to the rhythmic organisation of the musical surface".



set,¹⁹ pulses are divided into groups of two and fifteen. Other songs have phrase lengths divided equally between solo and response, eight pulses in each.

(ii) a second common pattern comprises stanzas with four phrases. The first and third phrases are of solo material, and the second and fourth are responses, the fourth always a tone lower than the second.²⁰

(iii) stanzas of four phrases also occur, with the first phrase as solo and the next three sung by the entire group. Although the group takes their subject cue from the soloist, their text may change during the song, requiring rehearsal beforehand for the group to learn the words.

*Makerkeey teng'eeek* ('Soils are Different')²¹

Solo	<i>Ālē kimiitē bēsyēēt ake</i> (One day)
Group	<i>Kimiitē bēsyēēt ake lēyyē</i> (One day)
	<i>Kiboonto keey : Yēesu</i> (While Jesus was)
	<i>Kiboonto keey : Yēesu rubiikii.</i> (While Jesus was with his disciples)
Solo	<i>Ālē kyoomchinē biiko</i> (He was preaching to the people)
Group	<i>Kyoomchinē biiko lōkōōywēk</i> (preaching the news to the people)
	<i>Kyoomchinē biiko lōkōōywēk</i> (preaching the news to the people)
	<i>Kyoomchinē biiko lōkōōywēk.</i> (preaching the news to the people)
Solo	<i>Kimwoowunēē ng'aleechaa</i> (He said those words)
Group	<i>Kimwoowunēē ngaleechaa tyōōnochēēt</i> (He said those words in a parable)
	<i>Kimwoowunēē ng'aleechaa</i>
	<i>Kimwoowunēēngaleechaa tyōōnkōōchēēt.</i>
	(up to 4 more stanzas are possible before the refrain)

*Refrain section:*

Solo	<i>Makerkeey teng'eeek</i> (Soils are not the same, x4)
Group	<i>Makerkeey teng'eeek lēyyē</i>
	<i>Makerkeey teng'eeek</i>
	<i>Makerkeey teng'eeek lēyyē.</i>

The song above has a refrain as well as responses. This refrain has same construction as the verses, and consists of a key phrase or 'punch line'²² that summarises the entire song. Its use is similar to examples found in mid-eighteenth century European hymn structure and more commonly in the evangelical worship songs that entered the world-wide Christian church from the late 1960s. The Charles Wesley /Handel hymn

¹⁹ *Ānkuurwēēt* is a type of shrub found on Mount Elgon. This song can be heard on CD:10.

²⁰ As in song CM 128A:336-274 (Bernard Chuma).

²¹ Song CM 123A:169-220, CD:34.

²² A term given by Mang'esoy.

'Rejoice the Lord is King!' ²³ has a division (four phrase stanza followed by refrain) not unlike Mang'esoy's song earlier:

<i>Verse</i>	Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore! Mortals, give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore.
<i>Refrain</i>	Lift up your heart! Lift up your voice! Rejoice! Again I say, rejoice!

In songs sung by only one person, the singer has even more freedom to vary the number of words in each sentence. Additions such as *wēē baabaay* ("oh dear me", which means anything from happiness to lamentation) and *lēyyē* ("please" or affirmation) are common. So are vocables such as *ōyyēē*, *ēē*, *āā*, *ōō*, *may* and *yēē*, often included to maintain the regularity of phrase lengths. They can also provide a brief resting point for the singer, pad out a short text, soothe a child as in a lullaby, or reinforce and focus an idea more persuasively for listeners.

Sounds imitating the snorting of cattle are always enjoyed in narratives and plough songs. Another popular vocable is *wōy ēē*, possibly derived from *wōōyē* (vt.) meaning 'to reconcile fighting people', an action which was formerly very much part of the Sabaot way of life. It is not unnatural to suppose that this term was used in traditional songs, eventually reducing to a vocable form. The many variations in spelling are simply stylistic variations,²⁴ but the shorter *wōy* is used for stress, whilst *wōōy* indicates a non-stressed emotive rendering.

When a *bukantiit* is present, the instrumental melody continues in a cyclical manner whilst the singer overlays shorter phrases between sections of active movement in the instrumental line. This enables both parts to gain prominence without being covered by each other, and also adds a sense of excitement as instrument and voice play off each other.²⁵ The vocal entries are often cryptic, similar to proverbs, with names of people inserted as a formalised attention-getting device on the part of the singer. A singer can also use a particular phrase or perhaps an instrumental flourish many times in a song, which also serves as a fall-back when inspiration fails.

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²³ The Episcopal Church Hymnal 1982, no. 481.

²⁴ According to Mang'esoy.

²⁵ For a notated example see 40A:294-340 (Appendix II, CD:27), a clan-praise song sung by Kisinja.

As would be expected, the shorter a song or the more frequently sung, the more stable it becomes in content, which contributes in no small way to the rapidly growing knowledge of shorter chorus-style church songs on the mountain.

The actual choice of words in a song text depends entirely on the singer's disposition, and a song can be "soft" or "biting" depending on whether it skirts the issue or approaches it direct. As Lord points out (2000:99), a story is not a fixed text but a flexible plan of themes. The words, particularly in a lengthy song, can never be fixed. They are being recounted in a performance that is totally unique in itself, in which variation is only relative to that single rendering. Often one of the aims of a song is to influence others' opinions and behaviour, and a good singer should be able to highlight certain parts of the text in order to "add more steam and give strength to the message".²⁶ Those who simply enjoy the pleasurable aspects of entertaining others rather than sharpening the issue being addressed are still appreciated but to a lesser extent.

There is no normative means by which a singer should expound his or her message, but a comparison of song texts and oral discourse reveals many parallels. In studies of Sabaoth hortatory techniques, Jim Leonard notes features used for marking the point of a theme in a manner that is intended to gradually focus the listener on a main point. It is inappropriate for a Sabaoth to say something too bluntly, hence someone addressing their brother about a drink problem might begin the conversation very indirectly, building credentials and minimising direct references. Only then would they move to more specific language and introduce the word 'drinking' rather than 'problem', replacing generalisations with various intensifiers.

A sung example of this might be a recurring bridge section or response phrase which identifies with a keyword, and reinforces through repetition similar to that of the *Makerkeey teng'eeek* song above. Another might be the use of the intensifier 'very', or the singer replacing implied references with a more direct meaning such as 'you' instead of 'a person'.²⁷ Mang'esoy says of his own songs that he usually develops the

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²⁶ Mang'esoy.

²⁷ See Leonard (1977, 2001) on discourse marking and other lexical features.

theme with a first section of generalised introduction, develops the main theme in the central section and then concludes with additional emphasis.

The use of hortatory devices in songs is affected by the structure of the song itself. In call and response, the solo sections are often limited in length and it requires a skilled singer to build intensity when the flow is continually switching between participants. Borrowed European church hymns and chorus structures use regular metrical lengths and well defined melodic forms, and singers tend to sing these either as memorised words or from a songbook. There are few opportunities to use peak marking features or phrase extensions in a hymn, and the four-line structure with third line intensifier and fourth-line tension release does not always fit with the development of a vernacular text. For this reason, the more effective hortatory message songs are usually the solo narratives, as in these the singer has freedom to employ whatever devices they feel will result in naturalness of expression.

The singer can direct attention to the most important part of the song message by means of body movements and auditory devices. In a song normally accompanied by dance, the approaching peak will be shown by an increase in body movement amongst those participating, with the half-jump becoming more pronounced, the knees more bent, and the arms swinging more energetically. If there is no dance, the playing movements of the instrumentalist may become more stylised.

Shouts, grunts, ululations, vocables, hissing through teeth and whistling may be inserted by any of those present. Speech can also be used at these points during songs, such as two or more people jousting short phrases back and forth. Both the singer and *bukantiit* player may add glissandi or more notes between each pulse, conveying an increase in intensity. All of these devices or embellishments are intended "to make the song stronger", and the simple repetition of an entire section without adding any variation is to be avoided.

Little investigation has been done as yet on Sabaot poetic forms, but it is highly likely that many poetic devices also occur in song texts. Merriam (1964:188) gives an example of short vowels becoming long in a Maori song, and Mang'esoy agrees that changes like this can occur in a Sabaot song but are considered unimportant as listeners will mentally substitute the correct version. No poetry

construction guidelines are currently taught in the Mount Elgon schools that can help musicians in constructing songs. Neither, I am told, is there a word for poetry in their language apart from *mashairi* (Swahili).

Owing to the oral nature of the Sabaot culture until the mid 1900s, 'poetry' was not written down but existed either as song texts accompanied by the *bukantiit*, or as unaccompanied oral recitation. The proposed translation of the Book of Psalms into Sabaot by SBTLL will involve a thorough study of these forms, but for now, skills are passed down through listening and from an early age children become adept at riddles (*chēbotyoonkōōch*), puzzles and other word-games.

Storytelling or *rāru tyoon kōōchēēt* ('cutting a story') is a genre often inseparable from songs, and very popular in the family home. If the narrator is able to play the *bukantiit* well and the instrument is to hand, they will often take a known melody and set their words to it in an extemporary fashion. For this reason, a number of songs recorded during my travels on the mountain appear to have similar melodies, with the singer describing it as a "traditional song". The confusion was resolved by Mang'esoy: within certain traditional stock forms (types), a number of melodies can be reused with other texts if the style of text (poem/ story) matches the song.


The spontaneous combination of a story line and melody requires rapid composition and special skills. Some singers have memorised their song material in advance, particularly response sections, but the majority adjust the melodic line, rhythm and phrasing during the course of the performance in order to accommodate their words. It is no coincidence that the structure of many accompanied narrative songs alternates singer with instrument, giving the performer brief respites to plan the next utterance.

Storytelling themes include animals, history, mythology and moral tales. Many of these have been published (Masinjila, 1998), but one example recounts of a huge animal called *Chesosum* who ate everyone in the area except for two small boys who were staying with their grandmother. The boys announced "we want to go and face him", so the grandmother sang a song to entice and calm *Chesosum*, allowing the

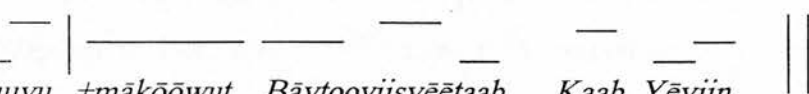
boys to spear him to death. When they cut his stomach open, sheep, goats and thin people tumbled out alive.²⁸

### 7.3.1 Vocal-linguistic tone relationship


Most of the discussion on this subject occurred during song workshops, and was led by mother tongue speakers who had translation experience. Some issues were triggered by problems that emerged during composition, others were taught at the start of sessions, which began with the participants jointly examining a Scripture text that had been translated into Sabaot. The group in Saboti, for example, looked at a section of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-4), first reciting the text amongst themselves until all were agreed on the tone and general intonation as shown marked below.²⁹ Here, a single line represents a phrase break, and a double line represents a section break:




³ *Ibēruurootiin, sōō, kule nee :biiko choo imoong'tēē keey Yēyiin,*



*kuuyu +mākōōwut Bāytooyiisyēētaab Kaab Yēyiin.*



⁴ *Ibēruurootiin, sōō, kule nee :biiko choo miitē kuriirtōōs,*



*kuuyu +/makiibaybaay."*

This process of moving onwards from spoken words into actual song is covered in chapter 8.3, so comment here focuses on the vocal-linguistic relationships that have emerged so far. The picture is by no means complete, and hopefully there

²⁸ Mang'esoy interview, 21 July 1997.

²⁹ Refer to Dargie (1983:11) on finding a melody from the natural tonal and rhythmic patterns of spoken words. I have found this to be an excellent means of raising awareness amongst mother tongue speakers as to how language and melody can either partner or conflict with one another.



will be further research in years to come. What *is* known is that the narrative songs in particular show considerable correlation between the sound patterns of word and melody. What is less understood are the acceptable parameters within which a melody can move yet still match the lexical requirements.

In a mid to low tone fall such as is used for the word *:biiko*, the melodic line can either fall a minor 3rd or be represented by two low pitches:

*:biiko*
people

(i)

sōō, ku - le nee yo *:bii - ko* choo

First use of <*:biiko*> in song 47A:89

(ii)

I - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, ku - le nee yo *:bii - ko* choo

Subsequent use of <*:biiko*> in song 47A:89

The same holds for a low to mid rising tone as in the word *Yēyiin* (God), found in the same song:³⁰

(i)

i - moong' - tēē keey *Yē - yiin*

(ii)

bāy - too - yiis - yēē - taab kaab *Yē - yiin*

Rhythmic stress or correlation with the tonal centre can substitute for higher tone, as shown by the word *sōō* in measure 17 of the same song. It normally has high tone (H)

³⁰ Song 47A:89-122, ref. Appendix II.

in speech, but in the song it contradicts the tonal expectation by sometimes occurring in the middle of a falling melodic line where it is heavily articulated.³¹ The same substitution of an accent in place of a rising pitch is also seen in the opening phrase of this song, on the third syllable of *I-bē-roo-tiin*.

Experienced singers are able to anticipate whether a particular melody will be a suitable tone frame for the text they have in mind, knowing that they can make small adjustments as they go but at the same time wishing to keep the original melody recognisable. If a particular word or phrase is a poor match with a pre-determined melodic line (or vice versa), the singer will likely rephrase the words in order to reduce any risk of ambiguity through incorrect stress or tone movement. Song composition workshops have shown that most musicians prefer to handle a text very freely, such as rephrasing and breaking it into shorter sections. Setting a direct translation of any given text takes an inordinate amount of work and usually reveals compromises in the tonal match.

It is also expected that a singer will expound a particular idea in such a way as to make sure listeners fully understand the intended meaning, and this may require repetition or simplification of the original text. Any possible ambiguity arising from a particular word is avoided through the context in which it is used. Furthermore, a traditional style singer does not refer to written words, so no two performances will ever be the same, either melodically or textually. Mang'esoy prefers this approach as it enables the rules of poetic style to be followed more easily, avoiding what he terms "reading style".³²

The rules become even more relaxed when the words of a Swahili song are translated into Sabaot. If the intonation of the following text is compared with the melody line of song transcription 39B:163-207 in Appendix II, it will be seen that there is considerable variance between speech and sung pitches. Even more doubtful is that the melody retains an identical pitch sequence for every verse, although there are small changes in the rhythm to match the syllable count.

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³¹ Supported by Agawu, 1987:411.

³² His comments arose after listening to a workshop song composed as a text utilisation exercise (47A:122-134).

*Rubiichooto (Those Disciples)*³³

(Verse 2)

L LMMH LL L LR HL LH  
*Nyoo kikiisöötë kule churtaat inee miisin*  
He who we take to be a blameless one  
M M H HH MH L M L M H  
*Bësyöösyëk tukul kumii kwëenuunyoo :acheek.*  
is always in our midst.

H L L L L LL L LR HL LH  
*Änkööbërbëërëëch kule churtaat :inee miisin*  
He is a hypocrite who pretends to be righteous  
MM HHH H LH  
*Äkoo :inee ku choomtooyiin.*

However, he is the betrayer.

(Chorus)

L M L H L M L H L M H M L L M H M M  
*(Rubiichooto) rubiichooto kitoow :icheek kööröötoot keey koonyek*  
(Those disciples) those disciples started to look at one another's faces  
M H M M H M ML L M L H HL  
*(:Chii ng'oo nee) :chii ng'oo nee nyooto mäku chaamta Yëesu*  
(Who is the person) who is the person, the one who will betray Jesus?  
L M L L M L MMM H LL M H M HL  
*(Kwëëmuung'waa) kwëëmuung'waa kimänëenkët kule :chii ng'oo nee nyooto*  
(In their midst) in their midst they do not know who the person is  
H ML L H HL  
*Nyoo makuchaamta Yëesu.*  
Who will betray Jesus.

(Verse 3)

ML L H H H MHL LMMM  
*Yuuta nyooto bo taayta takumiitë kura*  
That very Judas is still there, even today  
M M H HH MH L M L M H  
*Bësyöösyëk tukul kumii kwëenuunyoo :acheek*  
He is always in our midst  
M L L MH LLMH HMM L L H  
*Änkööbërbëërëëch kule :inee ku akeenke nyëenyoo*  
He misleads us to believe he is one of us  
MMHH H MM H  
*Äkoo inee ku këniintëët.*  
But he is a liar. (chorus as before)

³³ Taken from *Tyëenwookik chëë /kiikoostëë Yëyiin*. (No year given), Kisumu: Church of Christ song book (uses old ortho graphy). Tone markings supplied by Mange'soy. Verse 1 is not used as the first phrase is missing on the recording. Song 39B:163-207, Appendix II, CD:32.

### 7.3.2 Syllable stress, vowels and rhythm

The Sabaot language has no general stress rule such as that of the penultimate syllable in Swahili words. Neither does stress necessarily occur on roots within words, as the context (or grammatical distinctions between object and subject) can override this. In the text example of the previous section, the first word, *Ibēruurootiin* ('Blessed are those'), requires more emphasis on the syllable that represents the object:

*I - bē - ruu - roo - tiin*  
 root            object

In the performance of this song (47A:89-122), the singers place a noticeable accent on the object syllable, but with no rise in pitch.

If there is no subject-object designation, roots within a word carry slightly more stress than a suffix or prefix. For example:

*mēkēyoontēēt* egg (has more stress on the syllable underlined)

It is also necessary to make a stress distinction between certain words that sound sufficiently similar and may give rise to confusion. The following example was supplied as spoken speech by Kiboki:³⁴

<i>chōō yu</i>	come (as in 'soft' version, has no stress)
<i>cho yu</i>	come! (stress on the first word)

Although most traditional songs have a metrical framework, the distribution of syllables within texts varies as in free speech. As a general rule, Sabaot traditional songs are syllabic, meaning the partnership of syllable to pitch enunciation is one to one, but a number of devices allow for accommodation of the actual number of syllables. If a singer is unable to fit all the words in a particular phrase, then syllables, phonemes and even entire words can be omitted. An example is taken from the *Mēliilto* song used earlier:

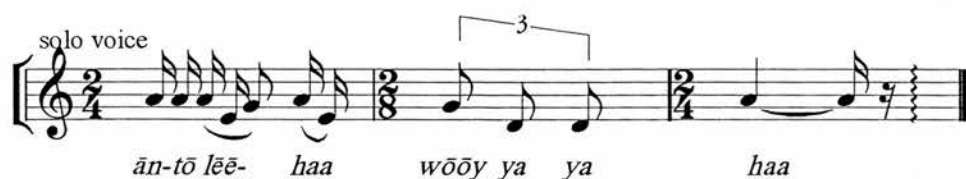
*Kēēbkoonēē tulwo tuuy, wōy baabaay*  
We come from a mountain which/that is black, my father.

The full rendering in Sabaoth should have been:

*Kēēbkoonēē tulwēēt nyēē tuuy, wōy baabaay*

³⁴ Interview, 18 September 1998.

This is such a common device in speech that listeners seldom notice such elisions. Alternatively, a syllable can be stretched over two or more notes as a melisma, but this is normally restricted to vocables:



Excerpt from *Sōōsyoo kimiirēy*, 41A:162-197.

Response sections are often overlapped by the entry of the solo voice, which serves to keep the momentum and tension of a song, and also allows the soloist to fit their text within the ongoing pulse and overall phrase structure. The pulse is particularly important, consistent from start to finish, but beneath it lies a song line full of variety, the words and melody intertwined like two fish leaping together in the water. A high syllable load is accommodated with shorter and often repeated notes, creating a sense of liveliness in the performance that is much appreciated by listeners.

It should now be appreciated that each stanza has a slightly different melody in order to achieve correlation between the number of syllables, the tone requirements and the stress of the text. Achieving this, in some instances whilst simultaneously playing another melody on the *bukantiit*, is a skill best acquired from an early age, as demonstrated by recordings of Mang'esoy's son singing solo sections with the confidence of a much older performer.³⁵

A. M. Jones observed many years ago that African music cannot be held in a strait-jacket of contrapuntal rules without restricting the liberty of melody (1949:11-12), and this too is part of the predicament which the Sabaot are increasingly experiencing. Those songs that are translated from Swahili exhibit less flexibility in melodic treatment of the text. In the song text quoted a few pages earlier (*Rubiichooto*), there are only two examples of melismas, both found in brief solo voice inserts:

³⁵ For example, song cassette entitled *Akeenke Yēyiintēēt* ('God is one'), *Tyēēnwookikaab Bukantiit Sabaot* (CM 129).

# Use of melisma in Church chorus (39B: 163-207)



Although the melody remains largely the same for every verse and chorus, the number of syllables in each line of text differs slightly, necessitating some instances of elision in order to fit the number of melodic notes:

<i>kwēē-nuu-nyoo a cheek</i>	becomes	<i>kwēē-nuu-nyooa cheek</i>
(5 syllables)		(4 syllables)
<i>ru-bii-choo-to ki-too :i-cheek</i>	becomes	<i>ru-bii-choo-to ki-too:i-cheek</i>
(8 syllables)		(7 syllables)

The growing custom with more recent songs, particularly in church settings, is for those who are leading the singing to learn and memorise the song from printed texts, so that subsequent performances have very little variation of melody or text.

As for the contrasting long and short vowels, there is no clear evidence that these must be matched by complementary note lengths. Other African languages have mora timing,³⁶ but there is no official statement on this with regard to the Sabaot language. Tests have shown that in some Kalenjin languages the long vowels are given approximately double the time of short vowels,³⁷ and in normal speech it appears Sabaot makes such a distinction, but song texts reveal no consistent pattern. The following brief illustration from a work song called *Teetaab kurēēt*³⁸ has short vowels of two rather than one mora in length (as in *-ta*) and long vowels as a single mora in length (as in *baa-*):

³⁶ Ref. P. Cooke (1970), also Katamba/Cooke (1987:65). Ephraim Amu of Ghana (1933) experimented with omitting time values from his song transcriptions because these could presumably be deduced from the speech rhythms of the text.

³⁷ Larsen, personal communications 9 March 1998, 15 May 1995.

³⁸ Song 43A:1-54, Appendix II, CD:21.





Contrast this with the excerpt given earlier in 7.3.1 (song 47A:89-122) which gives as good an example of the correlation between mora timing and melodic rhythm as is generally found, although the match is still not complete. The meaning, however, is clear. A. M. Jones's (1959:230-251) observation that musical factors override linguistic ones is confirmed by Mang'esoy:

"It is more important for the music to be natural and sweet. Even in grammatical analysis, there can occur irregularities in a given pattern".³⁹

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³⁹ Mang'esoy, personal communication, 14 June 2001.



### 8.1 Traditional musical forms

In African music, as elsewhere, there is a dilemma between old and new. In seeking to understand the resulting confrontation of values, this chapter compares some of the differences between two of the music styles currently used by the Sabaot; the traditional genre and the songs of the Christian church. Owing to the concerns that have prompted this research, greater emphasis is given to the traditional song genre, although structural, performance and social values are covered for both. The latter part of the chapter outlines how this analysis was subsequently tested amongst the Sabaot, and also discusses the significant findings which have emerged.

The music references within the analysis sections are based on song transcriptions, many of which can be found in Appendix II. Where possible, these have been cross-referenced to audio recordings on the accompanying CD, the index for which is given in Appendix III. The complete list of Sabaot music recordings as used for this research can be found in the Discography.

I begin with traditional songs, believing that the functional value of any song used by the Sabaot is very much defined by the purpose for which it is intended. In his study of Venda music, Blacking (1967:195) suspected that 'styles' were merely resources that acquired specific meanings as used. They could be adjusted or transformed, with the variations between one performance and another being drawn from a repertoire of 'essentially human values'. I therefore remain open to the possibility that stylistic features or characteristics found in traditional songs may have some validity when loaned to other genres, and will consider this in the later stages of this chapter.

#### 8.1.1 Tonal structure

As noted in chapter three, when the *bukantiit* is played in the plucked manner, there are usually two parts created, upper and lower. The upper is the melodic focus of the song, whilst the lower part is often in parallel or homophonic relationship to the upper line, maintaining intervals of thirds and fourths and occasionally fifths. This

parallel motion helps the player to maintain tonal relationships with the text in all parts. Whereas the *bukantiit* is tuned to either pentatonic or hexatonic modes,¹ examination of Sabaot vocal parts shows additional ranges and organisation of pitches in apparent contrast to the accompanying instrument.² Occasionally the vocal line matches the *bukantiit* melodic line in pitch and range, but it is more common for a series of shorter and fragmented melodic phrases of higher or lower pitch to be interwoven into the constant playing of the *bukantiit*.

Historically there is no knowing which developed first, the *bukantiit* or the vocal style, but owing to migratory patterns, in all probability the two have been in close proximity for a considerable period of time. Sabaot musicians have repeatedly told me that the *bukantiit* is subordinate to the voice, yet in the narrative songs there is considerable interplay between the two, the voice alternating phrase by phrase with the *bukantiit*. Furthermore, in a test to determine if instrumental tuning sets were based on cognitive choice, I asked several musicians to sing the pitches to which their *bukantiit* was tuned without prior exposure to the sounds of the strings. They were unable to do so without first humming an unaccompanied section from one of their songs, implying that the concept of tuning is imbedded in the overall instrumental and vocal modal pattern.

From a harmonic consideration, Sabaot traditional songs do one of two things. Those with *bukantiit* may have several layers of musical sounds, whilst songs which have no pitched instrumental accompaniment are predominantly monodic. There has been debate as to the existence of polyphony in traditional African music, with some musicologists believing its presence to be a manifestation of early stages of human civilisation.³ Hornbostel (1928), Nettl (1956), Kuunst (1959) and Waterman (1993) credit polyphony or multi-part as being of deliberate compositional intent, whilst many other ethnomusicologists feel that harmony in older African songs is either accidental or due to overlapping antiphonal structure (as in call and response).

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¹ See chapter 3.2.5.

² Omondi (1984) mentions Luo songs accompanied by the *thum* lyre in which the vocal parts are based on a heptatonic scale while the *thum* uses pentatonic.

³ Ref. Mensah's report (1980:181).

Clarification is needed on the use of terms such as polyphony and harmony. The latter will be avoided here in reference to traditional songs as it implies conscious linking with European chordal structure and function. Polyphony is preferred as it refers to any multi-part texture and does not necessarily imply that the parts move independently of one another.⁴

The influence of choral singing traditions is now firmly established in Kenya in both church and secular song events, but to varying extents. Joseph Kwemai Morongo commented of his own church in Chewangoy that "part-singing is only used by special church choirs and does not occur in songs sung by the whole congregation". Yet when I attended a service in this same church, it was clear that some occasional division of parts in congregational singing *was* taking place. Even allowing that this may have been the church responding to perceived expectations of a 'foreign' visitor, it is now unusual to hear any antiphonal song amongst the Sabaoth, even those of secular ceremonies, that does not incorporate at least some part-singing.

Mensah states (1980:181) that "any simultaneous occurrence of two or more pitched sounds in African music may be regarded as a chord", meaning a structure for such progressions should at least be considered before advocating independent polyphony. It is therefore necessary to understand how vocal and instrumental lines relate in Sabaoth traditional songs, beginning with patterns of tonal weighting or prioritisation.

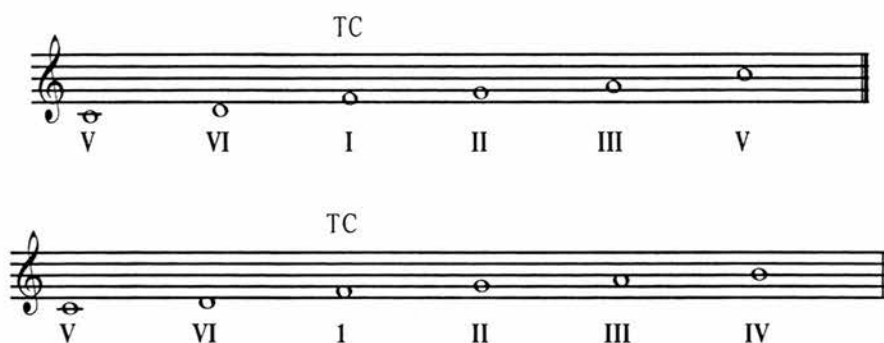
The practice of referring to a succession of tones as a 'scale' is largely due to the classification emphasis of European modal theory.⁵ It is not directly relevant to this study, but provides a good starting point for the discussion on tonal weighting in instrumental songs. When the pitches of lyres tuned either to the pentatonic or hexatonic pattern are compared to a diatonic scale, a familiar pattern emerges, namely that the pentatonic is missing both the fourth and seventh degrees, whilst the hexatonic is without the seventh.⁶

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⁴ Ref. "Polyphony" in *NGDMM*, 20:81 (P. Cooke).

⁵ Ref. "Mode" in *NGDMM*, vol. 16 (Harold S. Powers).

⁶ In the following examples, TC represents 'tonal centre'.



In plucked *bukantiit* accompaniments, the pitches of the right hand or upper melodic line are ordered in such a way that the tonal centre (TC) predominantly falls on the third lowest pitch in the scale sequence, as in the examples above. The use of a tonal centre concept is verbalised by the Sabaot when they speak of certain strings being "of interest". In the lower *bukantiit* line, however, the tonal emphasis moves to the *first* note shown in the above scales.

This is better illustrated in the song transcription of 40A:294-340 in Appendix II, where both the vocal part and the lower *bukantiit* line centre on B flat throughout but where the melody line of the *bukantiit* centres on E flat.⁷ It would be tempting to say that from a European view of harmonic construction the tonal centre should be taken from the B flat in the lower line, but if the three parts are taken as an integral whole, the strongest harmonic pull then becomes E flat.⁸ In the majority of Sabaot songs, the pitch acting as tonal centre stands out clearly, but occasionally there is doubt. For example, in a post-birth purification song sung by Kororio,⁹ the pitches of A and D are very dominant, but I suspect the tonal centre is in fact G. Choosing D means there would be a jump of a major 9th above tonal centre, which occurs in no other Sabaot example.

Discussion with players throws further light on this harmonic structure, remembering that for the purposes of this thesis, strings on the *bukantiit* number from 1 to 6, high to low, right to left when facing the instrument.¹⁰ Kisinja states that

⁷ My use of key-signatures in these songs is not to prescribe a definitive mode but to indicate the pitch chosen by the singer on a specific occasion.

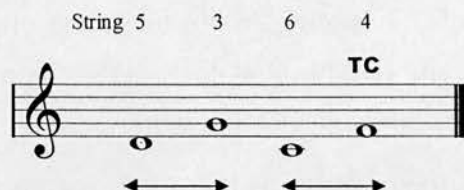
⁸ If the existence of a 'double tonic' (cf. Collinson, 1966:26 on traditional Scottish music) were assumed for Sabaot songs with no *bukantiit* accompaniment, it would enable the tonal centre to shift to another position in the pitch sequence under a secondary tonal centre rule. This will not be discounted as a theory from any subsequent discussion, but another means of deciding tonal centre will be suggested later in this chapter.

⁹ Song 38A:116-129, Appendix II, CD:12.

¹⁰ See chapter 3, plate 3e.

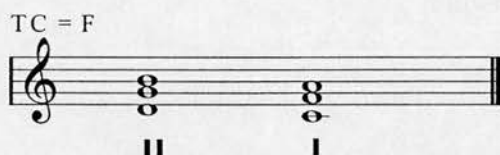


the most common pitches are a combination of strings 5 and 3, and strings 6 and 4. He adds: "Strings 3 and 4 are the centre of interest. When they are tuned well, the song flows". This means that on an instrument where the lowest string is notated for ease of transcription as C4, the relationships are as follows:

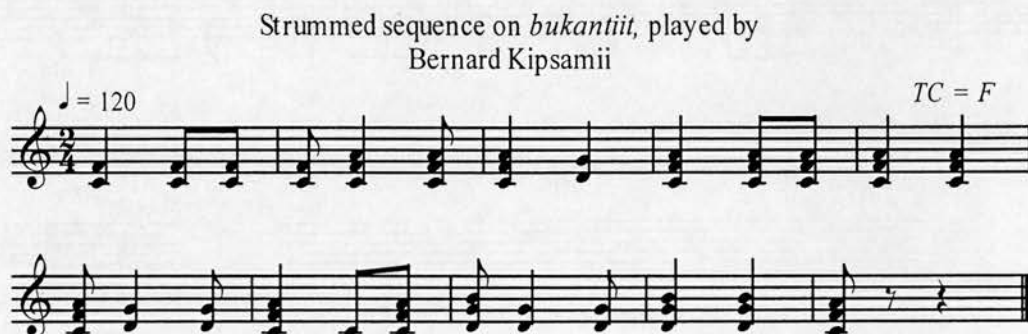


These intervals are so consistent in Sabaot songs that they can be thought of as 'musemes' or musical morphemes, a term first devised by Charles Seeger (1958).

If the remaining string pitches on a hexatonic instrument are added to these fourths, the result is two chords:



The lower lines provide 'harmonisation' to the upper, as seen in the following example of strummed chord technique:



Denyer (1980:7) notes the same string combinations of 5-3-1 and 6-4-2 being used on the *pan*. It is tempting, from the western perspective of functional harmony, to say Chord II resembles a second inversion of the supertonic,¹¹ whilst Chord I is orientated by the tonal centre, and equates to a second inversion of the tonic chord. However, such a description risks causing confusion by linking the harmonic

¹¹ From the system of chord classification established by Jean-Philippe Rameau in *Traité de l'harmonie*, 1722.

expectations of diatonic theory to non-diatonic music, and Kubik suggests that pitch combinations other than those based on the tonic should be more usefully referred to as either 'contrasting' or 'intermediate' steps.¹²

Denyer also comments that the less accomplished *pkan* player will usually stick to two basic chords, "changing from one to the other in such a way that the important melody notes (those falling on the beat) are contained in the corresponding chord". This similarly applies to the *bukantiit* as there is only one other chord possible, being the addition of the seventh (or string 4) to the chord **II** shown earlier, meaning players do not have much choice.

Plucking and strumming on the *bukantiit* creates a greater density of pitches than over a similar time frame of vocal line, but within these 'fill-out notes' (Kubik 1994:119), the intervals of fourths are dominant, as for example in an entertainment song performed by Kisinja:

Entertainment song, introduction (48A:309-398)

♩ = 96 TC = Ab

*Bukantiit*

Scale 4ths in instrumental line

'Fill-out notes' should not be confused with Peter Cooke's theory (1996:444-445)¹³ of an instrumental part being comprised of a basic melody or "tone bank" to which carefully selected "ancillary notes" are added. The above example has no additional notes inserted in the *bukantiit* part or vocal line other than those constituting the particular mode of scale for this song. The concept of a tone bank

¹² Kubik (1994:121) uses such terms in describing progressions of Azande harp music.

¹³ In this instance he is referring to the *ennanga* harp. Also additional comments in A. Cooke, 1999:48.

The predominance of fourths noted in the previous notated example is also likely to be closely connected to playing technique and spatial movement of the hands on the *bukantiit*. However, if unaccompanied songs are examined, it can be seen that in many cases there is an internal harmonic sense again based on fourths. In the following example, the predominant use of E is countered by resolution to the pitch of D:¹⁴

Although the pitch of A does not occur at the lower octave in this song, it exists an octave higher in the vocal part and could theoretically be part of the following sequence:

¹⁴ Song 44B:59-100, Appendix II, CD:14.

Even songs sung by those of a very young age such as the *chōōrēy*,¹⁵ match this pattern of fourths that could be based on imaginary *bukantiit* melodic construction, although the likelihood of exposure to this instrument at such an age is much lower.

A. M. Jones (1949:10) was possibly the first to examine the concept of chords or vertical structure, proposing the theory that African scales are based on a series of fourths with an occasional third.¹⁶ The combined upper and lower lines of Sabaot *bukantiit* parts create a similar series, but players such as Kisinja and Kinyokye are more adventurous and employ a range of intervals that include fifths and sevenths.¹⁷

CD No.19 Warrior song,  
*Mānyirōōr.*  
(tape ref. 39A:1-86)

♩ = 100 TC = E

*bukantiit* Bar 1

*kiiraanchiinek*

(player stops temporarily)

Solo male voice

(song continues)

The musical score is written for two parts: *bukantiit* and *kiiraanchiinek*. The *bukantiit* part is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩ = 100 and a tuning indication TC = E. The *kiiraanchiinek* part is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the *bukantiit* part playing a series of eighth notes, while the *kiiraanchiinek* part plays a series of eighth notes. The second system shows the *bukantiit* part playing a series of eighth notes, while the *kiiraanchiinek* part plays a series of eighth notes. The third system shows the *bukantiit* part playing a series of eighth notes, while the *kiiraanchiinek* part plays a series of eighth notes. The score ends with a double bar line and the instruction '(song continues)'.

It is only when the singer enters that the *bukantiit* part reduces to a greater use of fourths, possibly to allow the focus to be more fully on the voice or to lend more support.

¹⁵ Song 41B:271-278, Appendix II, CD:25.

¹⁶ Kubik (1994:172) notes similar patterns in the pentatonic traditions of vocal music in south-western Tanzania and Malawi. I make no apology for quoting Kubik extensively in this chapter, since his work, *Theory of African Music*, (1994), is based on music systems which bear many similarities to the Sabaot.

¹⁷ Also ref. Kisinja's Clan praise song (*aroosyek*, 40A:294, Appendix II, CD:27).

The three lines of vocal, upper and lower *bukantiit* therefore interact as an integral unit of simultaneous sounds or 'counter-notes',¹⁸ and additional polyphony in the vocal part is uncommon. However, there are many instances of overlapping first and last notes of phrases in the handovers between solo singer and response group, such as in the following example (CD 16). Note that the response structure never changes during the entire song, creating an ostinato beneath the freer solo part:

*Tyēēnwookibaab lukēētaab booryēēt (wōōrintō)*  
warrior song (41A:19-72)  
Sung by Ndiwa

TC = F

♩ x 5 = 44

Response (these divisions continue to end)

(sim.)

(song continues)

Another more noticeable use of overlapping is found in a circumcision song,¹⁹ where solo and response parts cross for several beats at a time. Both parts are based on a similar pattern, hence the staggered entries of response and solo create a hocket effect:²⁰

1st phrase                      2nd phrase

Response

The solo line however, retains the necessary rhythmic freedom to accommodate the syllables of the text, and the solo part passes from one singer to another in this song enabling everyone to add their variant in turn.

¹⁸ Kubik, *ibid.*:171.

¹⁹ Song 42A:1-120, Appendix II.

²⁰ Kauffman (1980:400) considers the call and response pattern to be a formal extension of hocket technique.

The results of such overlapping were termed 'dichords' by Hornbostel (1928:13-15), who believed these to be a primitive stage of polyphony. However, the Sabaot currently make a distinction between over-lapping and extended sections of polyphony in traditional songs. In discussions after performances, the singers pointed out that part-singing in other sections of a song was unintentional, either due to a difficult vocal range, not everyone knowing the same version of the song, or the transference of part-singing experience from other musical contexts such as church music. As I have not had access to Sabaot song recordings predating my own, I can only conclude that a unison vocal line has been the norm until relatively recently, but that part-singing is now entering the traditional repertoire.

### 8.1.1.1 Emic analysis

In addition to the instances above where performers have given emic solutions to analytical problems, analysis has been needed to better understand those issues where either language or differing cultural concepts have prevented a clear picture from emerging.

The first question is whether variances in tuning of the highest string of the *bukantiit* are deliberately different from one another. By comparing song transcriptions to see if these pitches are found in the same environment (referring to the movement approaching and departing from the pitch in question) it can be seen that identical parameters of each occurrence can be found in a number of songs. According to Chenoweth, this raises the likelihood that these two tunings of the upper string are intended to be distinct, meaning the pitches concerned are two separate emic units rather than being variants of one. This can be seen in the examples below, where the major thirds [M3H] which occur before and after the augmented fourth or perfect fifth constitute the 'environment':

Clan praise (40A: 294-340)

Top line of *bukantiit* TC = Eb

[M3H] [A4H] [M3H]

Hexatonic

*Chēēmoomo* song (48A: 275-308)

Solo voice TC = Bb

[M3H][P5H] [M3H]

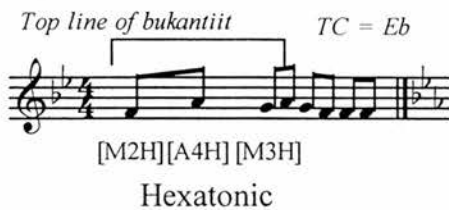
Pentatonic



Any such examples are always considered in relation to the tonal centre, hence the use of <H> indicates the interval is 'higher' or above the tonal centre. I have also compared interval sequences from instrumental and vocal lines, but only in cases where these parts are using the same sequence of pitches in a song. There are other cases, discussed later, where more than one sequence of pitches can be found in a song.

To make doubly sure of contrast between tunings, a further set of comparative examples using a different environment is given below. The traditional elopement melody has only been recorded as used by Mang'esoy in a recent song about King Herod,²¹ but I am told the original is still in existence with a secular text. The vocal melody in the second example is matched by the *bukantiit*:

Song about eloping (CM123A:263)



Chēēmoomo song (44A:82-101)



These variations require a player/ singer to have an innate awareness of how each melodic line relates to the tuning of the *bukantiit*. During a musical event there may be little time to change the tuning of an instrument, so the performer must choose songs that fit the pitches available. It is possible, therefore, for a song to be pentatonic even if the *bukantiit* is tuned to hexatonic, provided the upper string is never sounded.²²

It was noted in chapter 3.2.5 that the hexatonic systems include the possibility of half-steps when extended at the octave either higher or lower. In Sabaot songs deference is always given to whole tone intervals, which means potential half-steps are either sharpened or flattened so as to maintain a whole-tone sequence. For example, in a version of *Mānyirōōr*,²³ Kisinja uses the following *bukantiit* tuning:

²¹ Song CM 123A:263-316.

²² A recent example is a song composed during the 1997 workshop (30A:35, Appendix II, CD:37). Another example exists in the entertainment song of Kisinja (39B:1-71).

²³ Song 40A:2-245, Appendix II, CD:18.



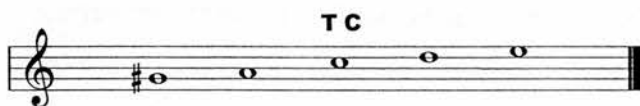
*Mānyirōōr* (40A: 2-245)

Within this song,²⁴ the *bukantiit* part uses the upper A sharp in a whole-tone sequence of [M3H] [A4H] [M3H] above the tonal centre (E), while the vocalist converts A sharp to A natural when it occurs below the tonal centre. The four-note sequences marked with arrows therefore become mirror images of one another with conjunct movement of major seconds:²⁵



Taken from *Mānyirōōr* song (40A:2-245)

This mirror treatment of pitches is common in traditional songs, but there is one possible exception as found in a pentatonic lullaby:²⁶



Lullaby: *Ōōrēēōō* (41B:278-299)



²⁴ This example occurs many times in the song. A similar sequence can also be found in the narrative song, 40A:294-340, CD:27 (sung by Kisinja, Appendix II) and in the *Mānyirōōr* 41B:192-245, CD:20 (sung by Kinyokye).

²⁵ Square brackets [ ] are used to indicate etic intervals, and slashes // to indicate emic intervals.

²⁶ This lullaby, 41B:278-299, can be found in Appendix II, CD:22. The meaning of the word *ōōrēēōō* is no longer known but may be a corruption of 'ōō rēērii' (meaning 'to suckle').

Here, prominent use of the A-G sharp-A sequence is made in every phrase, so is unlikely to be a momentary slip by the singer. Neither is there evidence to suggest this might be fluctuation due to a leap, as the pitch also occurs in conjunct movement. The diminished fourth below the tonal centre does not occur in any other song in the same environment as a perfect fourth, and is only found (to date) below the tonal centre. This means it exists in 'complementary distribution' and is a variant of the emic unit of a perfect fourth.²⁷ Blacking (Byron, 1995) describes this phenomenon as "different intervals and patterns which are regarded as the same", meaning the singer in the first lullaby could have used either a perfect or a diminished fourth.

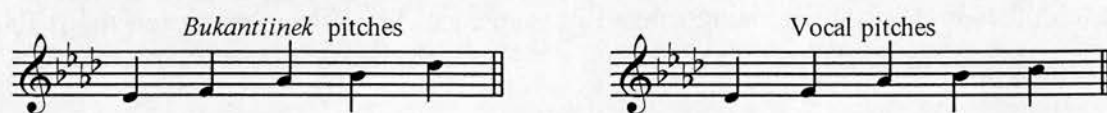
This was further confirmed when Mang'esoy sang the same lullaby using the interval of a perfect fourth:

Start of lullaby (*tyēēnto nyēē /kēēsooysooyēē keekwēēt*), *ōōrēērōō*.  
(as sung by Mang'esoy)



Another occurrence of a half-step can be seen in the transcription of *Buukwo*,²⁸ marked in brackets in measure 5. As this is the first utterance of the response phrase, and as the half-step occurs nowhere else in the song but is replaced by a whole tone step when the pitch next descends below F (measure 39), the conclusion is that the first pitch in measure 5 is an error.

An interesting juxtaposition of pitches occurs in a workshop song 48B:122-196,²⁹ but is based on an existing traditional melody. The *bukantiinek* players use one scale whilst the vocalists use another:



Song 48B:122-196

This is actually one of the clearest examples of the variable uppermost pitches (in this instance C and D flat) being mutually substitutable with each other in certain

²⁷ Ref. Chenoweth 1980:57.

²⁸ Song 41A:231-264, Appendix II, CD:11.

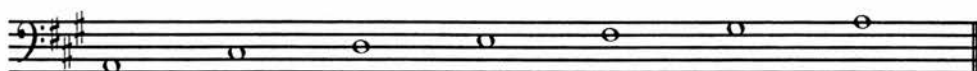
²⁹ See Appendix II.

intervallic environments. As these pitches are found in contrast in other songs (in the sequences given below), this means they constitute separate emic units although the singer in this case is treating them identically and ignoring the potential conflict of pitches:

[M2H] [M3H] [M2H]      vs.      [M2H] [P4H] [M2H]  
(in 48B:122-196, measure 4)      (in 39A:1-86, measure 3)

Unaccompanied traditional songs differ considerably in their organisation of hexatonic scales. For example, the following occurs in a song sung by Kororio:³⁰

Scale used in *Ngētunyto* (44A: 39-52)



Owing to Kororio's age, his voice is a little erratic in pitch and it is possible that the G sharp is an uncertain A. I have found no-one else who has attended a similar ceremony (people say Kororio is the last such surviving initiate) so have been unable to test this. In another recording of Kororio's, the overall pitch orientation in a pre-circumcision song appears to rise during performance, creating difficulties in establishing the intended scale and tonal centre.³¹ Again I do not have any other recording of this song with which to compare, so cannot be sure the rise is not deliberate. A transcription of this song is included in Appendix II, but owing to these uncertainties it has not been considered in the pitch succession chart compiled from Sabaot traditional songs.

A further variant to the hexatonic range is found in a warrior song sung by Kinyokye. In this, both B flat and B natural occur but are mutually substitutable for each other in a particular rising intervallic sequence. In a falling sequence the B flat is sometimes substituted with an A:

Scale used in *Mēēriirē kuu arrab keesoon* (39A: 212-237)



³⁰ Song 44A:39-52, Appendix II, CD:8.

³¹ Song 38A:81-94, Appendix II.

TC = F



Mutual substitution could mean that B flat and B natural constitute two separate emic units, leaving freedom of choice to the singer. However, I have doubts as to the accuracy of this as the song in which they occur has rising incidences of B flat and B natural only in the early stages, after which all such sequences become:

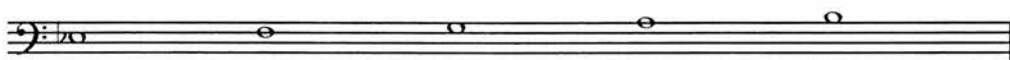
TC = F



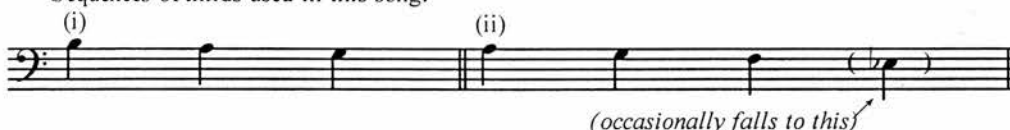
The presence of the rest means that the environment is no longer strictly the same, but enough similarity exists for me to suspect Kinyokye was unsure of the melodic line early on in the song and the scale should in fact be pentatonic (having neither B flat or B natural).

The pentatonic range includes an equidistant whole-tone version found in the fourth *sōōsyoo* marriage song (*buukwo*):³²

Scale used in *Buukwo* (41A:231-264)



Sequences of thirds used in this song:

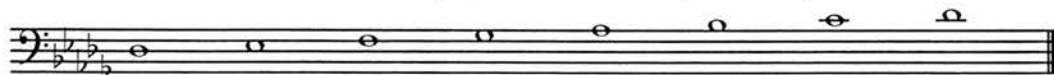


In this song, thirds predominate and it appears the tonal centre moves from the expected top note of the second triad to the G instead.

Diatonic scales are used in the warrior songs that I recorded from Andrea Ndiwa, and although this raises the question whether other influences are at work, Ndiwa has apparently never left the mountain and is considered by fellow Sabaot as a specialist in this category of songs. For example:³³

³² Song 41A:231-264, Appendix II, CD:11.

³³ Song 47A:63-89, Appendix II, CD:17.



The same scale also occurs in a song about twins (39A:237-267) which was sung by a group comprising Kinyokye, William Chelasia and Masai Kokeny Meseng'. Although again these are three well-known exponents of traditional repertoire, the response sections in this song seem very uncertain which may indicate they are in unfamiliar scale territory.³⁴

A more difficult song to diagnose is the third of the set called *tyēntaab saramEEK* (celebrating the close of the post-birth purification ritual for twins).³⁵ This song is interesting in several ways, both rhythmically and harmonically. The scale is diatonic, but the response sections are based on two falling segments that match the tonic and supertonic chords commonly used on the *bukantiit*. However, the framework is fifths rather than fourths:



In reflecting whether these variances might somehow be a sign of other influences, I am aware of Richard Waterman's conviction that the diatonic scale naturally occurs in African traditional music (1952:208-209). Merriam (1959(i):72) also suggests that the scale used in much of African music, whether traditional or in more contemporary categories, is "diatonic in its major aspects, although exceptions clearly occur".

To summarise this section on scales, the traditional repertoire is primarily constructed on hexatonic and pentatonic pitch sequences, but also includes diatonic examples. The latter are only found in unaccompanied songs, and the time-frame in which the adoption of such a scale system took place is not known. Whereas

³⁴ Diatonic is also used in the twins birth cleansing song sung by Kororio (38A:116-129, Appendix II, CD:12).

³⁵ Song 44B:151-175, Appendix II, CD:15.



instrumental tuning is prescriptive, unaccompanied songs have no such constraints, and any changes are more likely to emanate from these than from instrumental songs.

### 8.1.1.2 Range of pitches

In addition to scale systems, we need to briefly compare the nature of pitch distribution as used in Sabaot instrumental parts and vocal lines. It has already been shown that the vocalist does not necessarily stay within the same range as the instrument. Kisinja, for one, will often match his early vocal sections to the range of the lower *bukantiit* line, but as the intensity of the song increases so his phrases move higher.³⁶

Kubik (1994:118) says of Azande harp music: "The voice part... is somehow hiding in the total structure of the instrumental part", and this is largely true for Sabaot songs, where pitches in a given instrumental range can be doubled at the octave by a vocalist. The widest total range found so far in any song (including instrument, solo voice and response parts) is a twelfth.³⁷ The converse can also happen, with the least number of pitches used in any *bukantiit* part that I have recorded being four, and in a vocal part as low as three.³⁸

Whether any conclusion can be drawn that a particular pitch range always matches a particular song category seems dubious, as there is no emerging pattern of scale types across songs that are customarily grouped in sets of four. Of the *chōōlyēēt*, *sēēryēēt*, *sōōsyoo* and *tyeentaab saramEEK* sets recorded to date, none maintain the same scale throughout, and the relative pitch may also change from song to song. This is particularly as Sabaot musicians are aware of how relative pitch can be used: "Our tuning is almost the same, but we raise or lower the entire pitch so as to get more variety in the tonal range".³⁹

In a further consideration of song sets, there appears to be no overall tension curve extending from the first to the last song,⁴⁰ and if the form is responsorial, this will continue through all four songs. All or none will use instruments, and there will

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³⁶ Compare *Mānyirōōr* 40A:2-245 (CD:18), with praise song 40A:294-340 (CD:27), Appendix II.

³⁷ As in *mēliilto* 44A:7-38, Appendix II, CD:7.

³⁸ Compare song 44A:82-102, in which the player uses two groupings of fourths, and song 41B:268-271, both in Appendix II.

³⁹ Interview with Bernard Chuma Mulunda, September 1998.

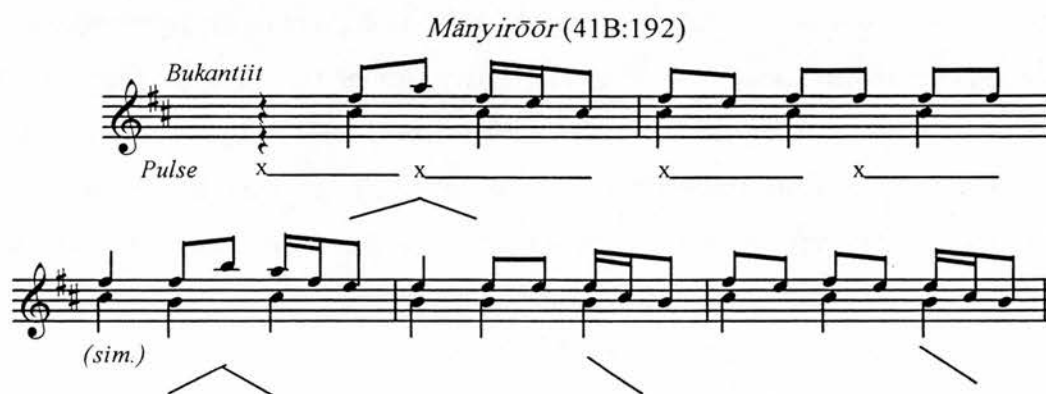
⁴⁰ A consideration of Blacking in his work on Venda songs (Byron, 1995:76).

also be a theme that links the entire text content, such as instructions for a newly married woman or praise after a successful circumcision. Debates during recording sessions as to whether songs in sets should be sung in a fixed order have remained inconclusive.

### 8.1.1.3 Melodic contour

The study of world musics has now extended the parameters of pitch organisation to include melodic type, motivic features and contouring. Gourlay's observation (1999:99) of Karimojong' cattle songs having "certain patterns [that] occur with such frequency as to be considered marks of style" is also true for many Sabaot songs.

The most prevalent shape, particularly in non-narrative styles, is an early high point in pitch at the start of a phrase cluster, followed by a subsequent downward fall to resolution using movement that ranges from conjunct to highly disjunct. At varying points there might be a narrowing standing complex, this being Kolinski's terminology for one or more upward pendulum movements, followed by a flattening out or reduction in movement (1965:100).⁴¹ Within this, additional up or down-steps can occur, creating what Jones (1949:11) described in African melodies as "a succession of teeth of a rip-saw" on a sloping downward trend.



Wider intervals create a chasmatonic or 'wide stepped melody',⁴² and pendulum leaps of fourths and fifths commonly occur above, below and across the

⁴¹ Chenoweth (1980:95) and Kolinski (1965) are among those who have used diagrammatic structures or melograms to show melodic profile.

⁴² Brandel, 1962:75-78.

tonal centre.⁴³ Less frequent are upward leaps of sixths, minor sevenths and octaves, some of which are captured in the following twins song:⁴⁴

Excerpt from *Naamuyaaya* (39A:237-267)

In a song celebrating post-birth cleansing,⁴⁵ Kororio sings a major ninth, but as no response group was available at the time of recording the song, this is not the normal context. It is likely this interval would only occur at the point of hand-over from solo to response or vice versa. The same singer leaps an octave and a minor seventh in a circumcision song, again unaccompanied due to no other singers being available.⁴⁶

Glides or rising glissandi using vocables are a common linking device between one phrase and the next. The Sabaot describe such moments between phrases as 'resting points',⁴⁷ and instead of glides may insert additional sung words such as *lēyyē*, *wōōyyē* and *baabay*.

In nearly every song, disjunct movement is combined with conjunct, but there is no one pattern that characterises any specific genre. A song can contrast disjunct activity in the solo voice against responses based almost entirely on the alternation between tonal centre and a major second above.⁴⁸ Alternatively the solo voice line

⁴³ An excellent example of this is *ng'ētunyto* 44A:39-52, Appendix II, CD:8.

⁴⁴ Also see Kisinja's clan praise song (40A:294-340), lullaby (41B:278-299), and *sōōsyoo kimiirēy* (41A:162-197), all in Appendix II.

⁴⁵ Song 38A:116-129, Appendix II, CD:12.

⁴⁶ Song 38A:81-94, Appendix II.

⁴⁷ Cf. 'punctuation devices', George List, 1963:4.

⁴⁸ Song 47A:63-89, Appendix II, CD:17.

may undulate gently in the region of the tonal centre whilst the response sections contrast by starting from a high point and falling.⁴⁹

Narrative songs tend to have more than one melodic point of climax, in keeping with any good story-line, and may achieve this through vocal, melodic and instrumental effects, text highlighting, or mime and body movement. Such devices can be used any point in a song depending on the story, and there is no pre-determined structure that must be adhered to. Some songs have a greater tendency to one or other feature, such as the children's song *Āmē musuunkuuk ntooteekwaa*⁵⁰ which is built entirely on conjunct movement of seconds:

[M3H] ↔ [M2H] ↔ [TC]

It is possible this song represents a down-grading in importance of pitch progressions to match a child's psychology,⁵¹ but other children's songs such as *chōōrēy*⁵² contain complex pitch movements that belie any down-grading theory. In summary then, traditional songs have a wide variety of melodic contours depending on their genre, but a highly characteristic pattern is one of linked falling phrases combining leaps, monotone repetitions and more gentle conjunct undulations.

Vocal ornamentation or embellishment is a feature that marks out the better singers and is much appreciated by listeners. Their laughter can be heard when one of the male solo singers in a *chōōlyēēt*⁵³ song set ends many of his phrases with a falsetto swoop. Another technique which so far has only been found in *mēliilto* songs is the use of rapid upper and lower mordents, somewhat similar to Arabic vocal embellishment although there is no known Sabaot-Arabic link. In this same song category, mordents are combined with upward interval jumps that remind one slightly of yodelling.⁵⁴

Although I have already stated in chapter 1.6.3 that I feel it unnecessary at the present time to apply the transformational aspects of Chenoweth's analysis methodology, it is nevertheless important to chart the tonal formula of each song in

⁴⁹ Ref. twins song 44B:151-175, Appendix II, CD:15.

⁵⁰ Song 41B:268-271, Appendix II, CD:24.

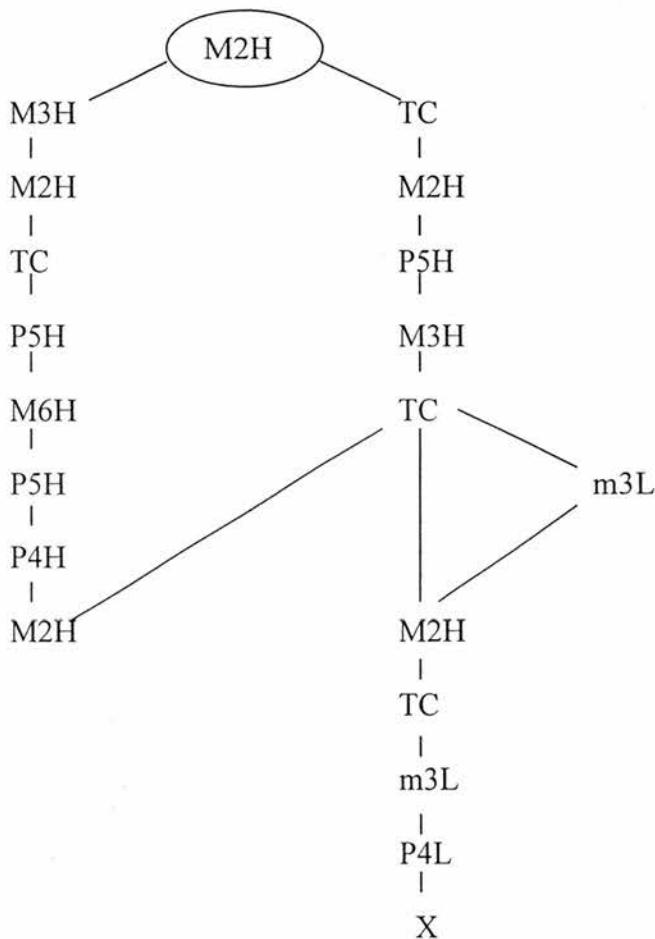
⁵¹ Considered by Agawu (1987:411) in his study of West African songs.

⁵² Song 41B:271-278, Appendix II, CD:25.

⁵³ Ref. song 42A:1-120, CD:4.

⁵⁴ Ref. songs 41B:324-345 (CD:6) and 44A:7-38 (CD:7). Both in Appendix II.

order to discover the allowable sequential movements of emic pitches that a singer can use. There are several ways this can be done, such as the following tree diagram that gives the order in which pitches of a particular song or typology occur. The example is taken from the vocal line of a *chēēmoomo* song, in which the circled pitch is the starting point for each phrase. The singer has a choice of which chain or sequence they can take, and further choices at later points. X marks the end of the song:⁵⁵



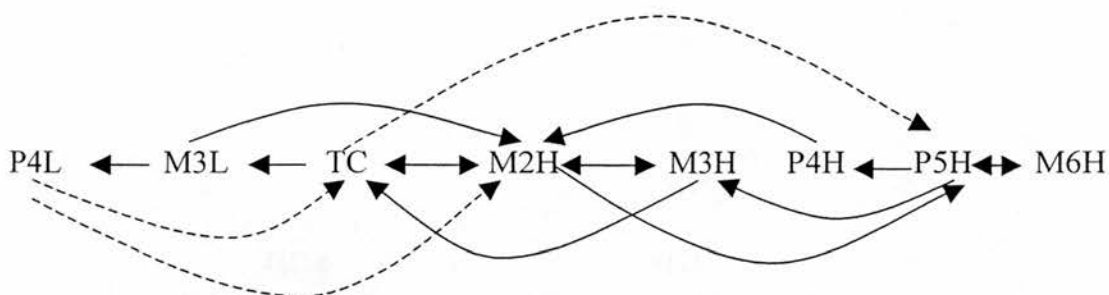
The problem is that this formula represents a melody designed for a particular text, and Sabaot songs rarely have identical texts from one performance to another. With tonal languages, this method can only provide a guide as to characteristic progressions and overall shape of the song unless the performer is aware of some additional 'rules' of progression. It is these which enable suitable adjustments to be made with each text.

⁵⁵ Song 44A:82-102, Appendix II, CD:3. The tree diagram method is devised by Chenoweth.

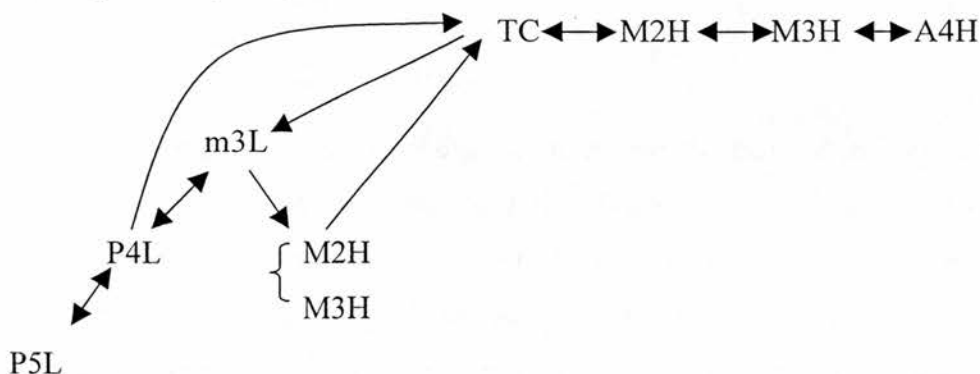
For a Sabaoth singer, such adjustments are based on prior knowledge of the syntactic restrictions for each pitch. If the same song is re-examined, the following progressions are evident:

TC	➔	M2H, P5H, m3L
M2H	➔	M3H, P5H, TC
M3H	➔	M2H only
P4H	➔	M2H
P5H	➔	P4H, M6H
m3L	➔	M2H only
P4L	➔	none

In prose, the first line therefore reads: 'The tonal centre can only be followed by a major second above, a perfect fifth above or a minor third below the tonal centre'. Another visual way of representing these syntactic restrictions is with a flow chart that shows how all the pitches relate.⁵⁶ Using the same list as above, dotted lines indicate movements that normally only occur over phrase boundaries:



To give a further example, the flow chart of a *Mānyirōr* song⁵⁷ shows the environs in which it is acceptable to use A natural below the tonal centre (P5L) and A sharp above (A4H):



⁵⁶ Chenoweth, 1980:83-86.

⁵⁷ 40A:2-245, Appendix II.



When the formulas of a number of songs using similar scale systems are combined, the full extent of intervallic progressions and syntactic possibilities becomes known. The summary of Sabaot traditional songs is as follows:

(i) Syntactic progressions that have occurred in gapped pentatonic and hexatonic songs:

TC	→ M2H, P5H, P4H, m3L, P4L (D4L)
M2H	→ TC, M3H, P4H, A4H, P5H, M6H, m3L
M3H	→ TC, M2H, P4H, A4H, P5H, m3L
P4H	→ TC, M2H, M3H, P5H, M3L, m3L
A4H	→ M2H, M3H
P5H	→ TC, M2H, M3H, P4H, M6H
M6H	→ M2H, M3H, P4H, P5H, M7H, P8H
M7H	→ P5H, M6H
P8H	→ P5H, M6H
m3L	→ TC, M2H, M3H, P5H, M6H, M2L, P4L, P5L, m7L
P4L	→ TC, M2H, M3H, P5H, M6H, P8H, m3L, P5L, M6L, m7L, P8L
P5L	→ TC, M2H, P4H, P4L
M6L	→ P4L
m6L	→ TC, M2H
m7L	→ M2H
P8L	→ TC
[D4L	→ TC, M3H, m3L]

Note that the diminished fourth below the tonal centre (D4L) is separated out in brackets as it only occurs in one lullaby and is a variant of the emic unit /P4L/.

(ii) Syntactic progressions that have occurred in songs based on the diatonic scale:

TC	→ P8H
M2H	→ m2L, M2L
M7H	→ TC
P8H	→ TC, M3H
m2L	→ P4L
M2L	→ P4L, P5L
P5L	→ m3L
m7L	→ TC, m6L
P8L	→ P4L

This interval inventory includes the cross-over interval between response and solo sections, based on the assumption that it is acceptable for a single singer to cover all parts when a response group is unavailable.

If this emic inventory were to be tested for validity, it would be used by an outsider such as myself to compose a song to a given Sabaot text. However, it is the treatment of the text rather than the accuracy of melodic progression that best determines whether a song is pleasing or not. With this in mind, a method for matching text with melody will be used in the workshops, and I hope that leaving the Sabaot composers to take the next steps will give greater insight as to the extent of their emic awareness for their own traditional genres.

### 8.1.2 Phraseology and form

The majority of *bukantiit* songs begin with an instrumental introduction and listeners recognise the song from this, even if the subsequent vocal melody is very different. The instrumental part provides a semi-rigid framework for the entire song that can be repeated many times, similar to Powers' (1980:39) concept of a fixed stratum of musical structure acting as a ground bass. However, it is also permissible for the *bukantiit* player to add structural or ornamental variations as long as the original is still clearly recognisable for other parts to relate to. If a *kiiraanchiinek* is available, it will join the *bukantiit* early in the song in order to define the rhythm, but will play no part in deciding phrasing or structure of the song.

Once the instrumental line is established, the vocalist will either continue with a melody similar to the *bukantiit* or present a contrasting shape and pitch range. As in narrative song traditions elsewhere in the world,⁵⁸ a Sabaot narrative singer will have a basic structure or formula in mind that helps maintain the flow of a song, and the inclusion of instrumental interludes allows time to think how the remainder of the song should be shaped.

Lord (2000:25) argues that singers are constantly expanding their repertoire and at the same time combining new things with those they already know. No song can ever be identical even if sung twice on the same day, and if heard after a passage of several years, it may seem like a new composition. Although the text is revised in order to have relevancy for those listening, Sabaot singers do not consider the putting of new words into old patterns as creating a new formula.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ Such as the Yugoslav epic narrative singing style documented by Lord, 2002:22.

⁵⁹ Compare with Lord's findings in Serbocroatian songs, 2000:43.

Unaccompanied singers have a greater freedom as to how they assign phrases or "breath groups" (Knight, 1984:35) within the overall cyclical structure of a song. One utterance may be no more than an exclamation, the next may be an extended florid section of several sentences. The order of these may seem irregular, but when the phrase structure is examined, the framework is clearly evident. This is demonstrated by the phrase divisions of the following post-birth cleansing song sung by Kororio: ⁶⁰

A (a b)	B (c d)	= nine pulses
A (a b ¹ )	B (c ¹ d)	= nine pulses
A (a b ² )	B ¹ (e f d)	= thirteen pulses
A (a b ³ )	B (c ² d)	= eight pulses

The A section is almost identical except for an occasional breath before the next phrase. The B section, however, is variable in length due to accommodating additional syllables, meaning the cyclical structure can be enlarged as necessary. A comparison count of the number of pulses between the call and response sections in other songs reveals that differences in phrase lengths can be considerable. ⁶¹

Alternatively, the vocalist and response group can have passages that are similar in length, and the contrast between this structure and the example above can be seen in the transcriptions of two twins post-birth 'coming out' songs that are sung in the same set. ⁶²

Regardless of phrase length, the A-B structure is one of the most common in Sabaot songs. In a lullaby, ⁶³ the solo voice sings a total of twelve groups comprising twenty-four alternating A-B phrases, all of six pulses in length and with no response group:

A (a b)	B (c d)
A ¹ (a ¹ b)	B ¹ (c d ¹ )
A (a b)	B ² (c ¹ d ² )
A (a b)	B ³ (c d ³ )
A ² (a ² b ¹ )	B ¹ (c d ¹ )
A ³ (a b ² )	B ² (c ¹ d ¹ )
A (a b)	B ³ (c d ³ )

⁶⁰ Song 38A:116-129, Appendix II.

⁶¹ A good example is the *sēērēēwo* song, *kēēmāche acheek ānkuurwēēnyoo* ("We want our ānkuurwēēt"), CD:10.

⁶² Contrast 44B:59-100 (CD:14, 1st song in *tyēēntaab saramēek* set) and 44B:151-175 (CD:15, third song in set), both in Appendix II.

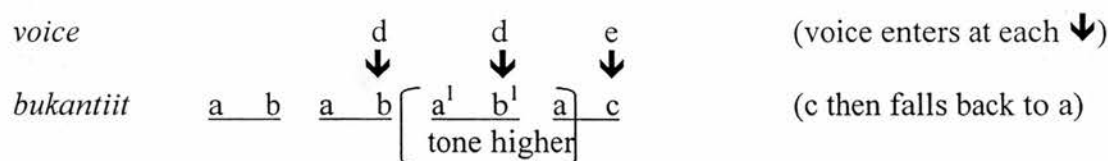
⁶³ *Ōōrēēēē*, Song 41B:278-299, Appendix II.

A ¹ (a ¹ b)	B ⁴ (c d ⁴ )
A (a b)	B ⁵ (c ² d ⁵ )
A (a b)	B ⁶ (c ³ d ⁴ )
A (a b)	B ⁷ (c ⁴ d ⁶ )
A (a b)	B (c d ¹ )

Here both A and B exhibit small variations in rhythm and choice of pitch, but it is equally possible that a phrase can remain unaltered. This occurs, for example, in a *chēēmoomo* song,⁶⁴ where the response section is consistent throughout whilst the soloist sings a short phrase that is constantly varied.

The same A-B structure can be used in accompanied songs with or without responses. Some songs appear to have a more dominant response part, almost pulling the attention away from the soloist, but although this may simply be due to a weak soloist at the time of recording, it is more likely to represent the level of group intensity on a particular occasion. There are no fixed rules as to how a response part should be constructed, and although there may be some rhythmic or melodic similarity with the solo sections, few are entirely imitational. Many songs begin with an extended opening phrase in which the soloist reminds listeners of how the response part should go by singing this in addition to the solo sections. If the song is not well known, it can take some time before the distinctions between solo and response become completely clear.

Whatever the pattern, the use of solo fragments interspersing either the response group or response with *bukantiit* is common. In the following example, a constant rising and falling progression occurs in the *bukantiit* part, with the vocal part superimposing its own two-part variant above:⁶⁵



Denyer's (1980:7) observation that the lyre serves as "an accompaniment to vocal phrases that have little melodic interest in themselves" also holds for Sabaot narrative songs, as the vocal line in these songs is not designed to be self-sufficient. However,

⁶⁴ For example, 48A:275-308, CD:2.

⁶⁵ Song 40A:2-245, Appendix II, CD:18.

there are specific cases such as *Mānyirōōr*, 40A:2-245, where the vocal part mirrors or counters the instrumental part.

Moving on from the simple A-B form, another *chēēmoomo* song⁶⁶ demonstrates a through-composed structure using new ideas up to and including phrase E, before reverting to earlier material:

A		BB	C
	D	E BB	C
	D	E BB	C

Although Sabaot children's songs are generally both short and simple, some such as *chōōrēy* are based upon the same structures and generalised norms as adult songs.⁶⁷ For example, the A phrase of this song is a steep downward cascade and then undulates until a jump up to the tonal centre at the end of every main phrase. The interval of a fourth also features prominently, and the entire syntactic structure is a reverting pattern, with repetition of material introduced earlier. It also revolves around the sub-b phrase:

A(a b)	B(c b)	C(d b)	B ¹ (c ¹ b)	C ¹ (d ¹ b)
A(a b)	C ² (d ² b ¹ )	C ³ (d ³ b)		
A(a b)	C ⁴ (d ⁴ b)	B(c b)		

Call and response antiphony or "the song which calls out and others answer",⁶⁸ is a form often used by the Sabaot, and is popular in most sub-Saharan cultures in the form of leader-chorus antiphony where two parties alternate. Kubik (1994:36) compares the alternation between two parties to a political scenario. Some prefer to be followers settling for passive collaboration, whilst others develop original ideas as soloists, but the collective result is a musical dialogue. The Sabaot refer to the response section in a song as *kāāruumchinooyēēt* which means 'murmur', but in character, this can vary from forceful expression to affirming "mmmm's".⁶⁹

Beginnings and endings of call and response songs are not strictly pre-determined, but the cyclical structure allows the phrase pattern to continue for

⁶⁶ Song 44A:82-102, Appendix II, CD:3.

⁶⁷ Song 41B:271-278, Appendix II. Blacking also observes this in Venda children's songs, 1967:35.

⁶⁸ Author of this quote unknown.

⁶⁹ As in sections of the pre-circumcision song 41A:288-313, CD:1.

whatever time is required or appropriate. A cultural time-reckoning system⁷⁰ is far more important to the Sabaot than exact patterns, and songs can either end abruptly, sometimes without consensus amongst the singers, or continue until other events dictate an ending is appropriate.⁷¹ This might mean the arrival of food or an important guest. If a song is very long, a reluctant soloist will either be forced to continue by a determined response group (despite sending out clear signals that he or she wishes to end), or else another soloist will take over. Others will happily continue for extended periods, as noted during a recording of Kisinja playing *Mānyirōōr*. He continued without break for over twenty minutes, later saying he was expecting me to signal him when to stop.

"The song which one sings by himself"⁷² describes the majority of narrative songs recorded for this research, but two exceptions, both recent history narratives, are sung by Kisinja.⁷³ The lack of responses may simply indicate that a good narrative singer is greatly appreciated by listeners and there is less desire to add responsorial sections unless invited by the soloist. It is also likely that prior rehearsal is needed to familiarise the group with the freer nature of each of these songs, and in these examples by Kisinja, he first extends an invitation to those present to join him, and then spends time demonstrating the response sections.

A sudden change of melodic direction in a responsorial song is unusual but when it occurs, the group takes its cue from the soloist's text. In a twins post-birth purification song,⁷⁴ there are two phrase shapes, each comprising solo and response sections. The soloist suddenly switches from one to the other with no visual indication to warn the response group. Such contrast does not seem to occur in *bukantiit* songs, but as there seems no reason why not, this cannot be ruled out.

There is considerable variation between the songs within any one category, and of the three versions of *Mānyirōōr* recorded by the author, all have different melodies, rhythms and *bukantiit* accompaniments. One is compound duple, another

⁷⁰ Ref. Roderic Knight's work amongst the Mandinka (1984:24ff).

⁷¹ See earlier comments in chapter 1.6.3.

⁷² Thomas Mutios Ndiwa, 8/99.

⁷³ Song 40B:2-72 which marks celebrations for the new Mount Elgon District, and 40B:73-161 which is a protest song to the KWS (Kenya Wildlife Service) for not controlling wild animals in crop areas (neither is included in Appendix II or on the CD).

⁷⁴ Song 47A:277-306, CD:13. Also occurs in warrior song 47A:63-89 (CD:17, Appendix II).



simple duple and the third oscillates between compound duple and simple triple.⁷⁵ Two which are sung by the same singer (Kinyokye) use different hexatonic tunings of the *bukantiit*. Both Kisinja and Kinyokye told me they had learnt these melodies during their age-set ceremonies, and certain song melodies will only be sung amongst members of that age-set.

A vocal soloist is expected to demonstrate 'freedom' which is why only the most proficient musicians will sing the narrative genre. The variations on rhythmic and melodic motifs are in effect an improvisatory response to the syllabic requirements of the text.⁷⁶ They will also use psychocathartic effects of excitement and game-play (Kubik, 1994:119) to involve their listeners. Techniques for achieving this may include textual enhancement devices as discussed in chapter seven, increased motor intensity (whether plucking or syllabic), contrasts between structural tension and relaxation, the addition of more percussive instruments, body movements, ululations,⁷⁷ shouts and other vocal effects. In addition to this, a song can be joyful ("makes me want to move") or sad. Kubik believes it is the use of psychocathartic elements which enables the Azande to enjoy instrumental music without the voice, but here the Sabaot differ, always preferring their lyre in partnership with singing.

### 8.1.3 Rhythm

Debates on rhythm in African music have included statements such as "we may accept the dominance of rhythmic and percussive devices as the outstanding characteristic of music in Africa south of the Sahara" (Merriam, 1959(ii):15). The Sabaot, however, have always used idiophones in a supportive rather than dominant role, and although the audible representation by *kiiraanchiinek* or *chuukaasiit* is certainly appreciated, it is not a primary feature of their music. It is more the *instinct* for rhythm that is valued by Sabaot.

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⁷⁵ Compare songs 40A:2-245 (Kisinja, CD:18), 39A:1-86 (Kinyokye, CD:19) and 41B:192-245 (Kinyokye, CD:20).

⁷⁶ Cf. Gourlay's work on musical traditions of the Karimojong' (1971), and P. Cooke's concept of 'nuclear theme' (1970:67).

⁷⁷ Lomax (1968:36) excludes ululations or 'vocal noises which do not employ discrete pitches and have no rhythmic regularity' from his scheme of cantometrics.

Rhythm has proved the most difficult aspect to explore with Sabaot musicians, particularly their understanding of elements such as 'beat', 'tempo' and 'metre'. Firstly, it is not unusual for local musicians to say "there is no beat",⁷⁸ as they equate this with the idea that a *kiiraanchiinek* player must be present. There are overtones here of Knight's (1984:25) theory that the concept of 'beat' is western and not present in any African concept of metre, but this must be weighed with the evidence of urban music centres such as Nairobi and Kisumu where the term is now a popularised catch-word.

Many attempts have been made by ethnomusicologists to find alternative ways of defining rhythmic components. Richard Waterman (1952) thought of metre as *metronome sense* or the ability of both players and listeners to supply an orientating beat against changing rhythmic activity. Hood (1971:114) preferred to use the fastest regularly recurring events in a song as a "density referent", and Kauffman (1980:407) took this further by grouping density referents into "accentual patterns" in order to define metre.

For this study I chose a definition of metre that I thought would be easily recognised by Sabaot musicians, namely the number of beats that form a measure or time unit. However, I have been unable to elicit to any convincing degree how metrical divisions are constructed in their songs, in particular what appear to be distinctions between duple and triple, simple and compound. The response is always "we think in two", an answer that is certainly reflected in the rhythm of many of their songs, but transcriptions will show that the organisation of this rhythm is often in phrases constituting uneven numbers of beats.

I am reminded of Kubik's similar quandary with Azande harp music, and his chart of possible metrical conceptions emerging from a single harp pattern (1994:116) well illustrates the problem. In my transcriptions, I have included a variety of metrical divisions but fully accept that, apart from occasional textual clues as to where a more prominent beat should fall, there remain many other possible permutations within some of these songs. In songs where metrical divisions have remained unclear, I have removed the conventions of barlines and time signatures in favour of larger blocks of phrasing.

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⁷⁸ Hilary Tirop, interview February 1999.

There is an understandable feeling amongst ethnomusicologists that African music should not be transcribed using time-signatures commonly adopted in western music as there is insufficient evidence of the African conception of metrical arrangement. However, watching body movements during performance has enabled me to draw some valuable clues from matching the visual and auditory perspectives, and to include an underlying pulse or time-line within some transcriptions. This acts as a pivot against which all other concurrent rhythmic lines are played or sung, but does not represent any audible click, tap or percussive instrument unless so indicated. Comparison of the time-line tempo in Sabaot songs averages a little faster than the normal heart-rate of a resting adult (seventy two beats per minute).

Although notation makes these songs more available to western interpreters such as myself, it does not imply I am a devotee of staff notation, and I willingly accept that there are other formats that could be used. The dividing of music into units of time can be both rigid and over-divisive, and there are obvious problems in applying this to those Sabaot songs which do not appear to have a clear numerical organisation.

A. M. Jones (1949:22) has observed a similar predominance of duple forms in the musics of Bantu language groups (by which the Sabaot area is surrounded), and also that they do not recognise triple metres. I am not aware of any comparable rhythm study amongst the Southern Nilotes, but it is feasible that metrical influences have spread from the Bantu.

Nonetheless, there are a few musical examples where the metrical organisation in Sabaot songs appears to be triple. A short excerpt is included on the accompanying CD⁷⁹ of a group of circumcision candidates approaching a village, blowing their *filimbi* in triple-beat phrases. The singing on this recording is negligible, mostly a stirring of excited voices of those accompanying the group, so gives no other time-line for reference. Another example is a marriage *sōōsyoo* song⁸⁰ with a strong sense of triple metre throughout, and a third example is the children's

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⁷⁹ Example is 41A:380-383, CD:30.

⁸⁰ *Yāālēy kwoolēy ng'oo*, 41A:131-162, omitted from the CD owing to heavy rain during recording.

*chōōrēy*⁸¹ song. There are also occasions where the pulse alternates between simple triple and compound duple as in a *Mānyirōōr* song,⁸² although the density referent (in this transcription being the eighth or quaver) stays the same throughout.

It was previously considered that syncopation was absent in African music (Ward, 1927:221), but thinking has moved on considerably as understanding of the complexity of certain African rhythms has increased. Hornbostel (1928:25-26) noted the silent arsis or 'act of beating' as a reality of rhythm in drummers, in that their flexing of arm muscles before striking the instrument created a duality of rhythm independent of the acoustic aspect. This was later taken as a cue by Blacking (1955:15) who wrote: "Westerners pay more attention to the sounds than to the movement that causes them".

Duality of pulse creates the need for a revised perspective on syncopation due to the physical body action occurring on the beat and the sound being on the off-beat. Merriam (1959(ii):14) came to the conclusion that this renders syncopation meaningless, but despite his misgivings, syncopation is a common device used by solo Sabaot vocalists in entering after the strongest pulse in a measure.

Anacrusis (an unstressed note or group of notes immediately preceding the main or strongest pulse) is another device often used, and although not syncopation, adds to the rhythmic variety available to the performer(s). This is demonstrated in Sabaot dance movements, where the peak or stronger pulse often coincides with the body rising upwards slightly behind the beat, rather than being marked with a jump onto the stronger beat. There is no evidence of polymetric 'crossing of beats' against other rhythms.⁸³

Although music is often used with emotive intent, physiological and mental responses to music are not the same for all ethnic groups.⁸⁴ A song with a relatively lively pace might seem inappropriate to use for a lullaby, but the Sabaot see this as secondary to using smoother vocal tones and repetition of key words to calm the child. There is also a very notable difference in the expression of sadness. The

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⁸¹ Song 41B:271-278, Appendix II, CD:25.

⁸² Song 41B:192-245, CD:20.

⁸³ Ref. A.M. Jones, 1954:28, 39-40 and Myers, 1993:243-246.

⁸⁴ Ref. L. Meyer, 1956 for a consideration of physiological response in music.

*chebaabaa*⁸⁵ is a mourning song recounting the exodus from the Mount Elgon moorlands, but although it is inappropriate to use the joyful *bukantiit*, the metronome pulse is certainly not dirge-like here. Instead it is the portamento between falling intervals that is reminiscent of women keening and brings anguish from the heart. Even the subtle use of *ntēkwēyiinēk* in this song is acceptable, perhaps symbolising the inevitability of the walk down the mountain.

These examples apart, there are other songs whose underlying rhythmic structure matches the rhythm of certain life events. As in any culture, work songs are obvious cases in point, but the actions that accompany some of the ritual songs fit well with the given tempo. Examples include the circular pacing of the singers in *chōōlyēēt*, the stamping on embryonic fluid in the twins post-birth cleansing ritual, and the thrusting spear movements of the *tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt* or warrior songs.

In performance, the basic tempo in instrumental songs is established by the *bukantiit* player, who will already be thinking of his first few utterances whilst playing the introduction. The tempo then stays relatively unchanged to the very end of the song, although Kororio adds occasional end of phrase *rallentandi* early on in a circumcision song.⁸⁶ Kisinja says he sometimes speeds up in songs,⁸⁷ but as discussed in chapter 3.2.6, this is more likely to be a reflection of the finger action he uses when he reaches the important points in his songs. In the same interview he also commented that "songs of the *Mosoobiisyēk* are slower". In neither case has any evidence of tempo variances emerged in recordings apart from occasional uncertainty in the early stages of some less well-known songs. It is more likely that Kisinja is referring both to the density relationship between the number of syllables and pitches and the belief that the *Mosoobiisyēk* speak more steadily than the *Sōōyiisyēk*.

When a *kiiraanchiinek* player joins the *bukantiit*, the dynamic and intensity of this instrument remains largely constant throughout every song, almost trance-like in steadiness. The rhythm is considered an important partner of the *bukantiit* although

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⁸⁵ Song 47B:248-288, CD:26.

⁸⁶ Song 38A:81-94, Appendix II.

⁸⁷ Interview, 25/9/98.



not strictly 'foregrounded' in the musical discourse.⁸⁸ Other percussive instruments such as *neembeyit* or *ntēēkwēyiinēk* will adopt a similar rhythmic pattern with no examples found of cross-rhythms. Clapping never occurs in traditional Sabaot songs, and it should also be noted that the use of drums is relatively uncommon when compared to more recent song styles, due to the limited number of song types in which they are required.

## 8.2 Church music on Mount Elgon

As a contrast to traditional songs, two further categories of song will be briefly considered here from those music styles currently prevailing amongst the Sabaot. The first category covers the songs of Mang'esoy and those other Sabaot musicians who prefer traditional styles of song but have exchanged secular texts for Scriptural ones. This would seem to be a repeat of what has been considered earlier, but there are a few differences that necessitate separate consideration. The second category is the genre of choruses and hymns sung in the churches on Mount Elgon today.

### 8.2.1 The songs of Patrick Mang'esoy

Mang'esoy's choice of tuning switches between pentatonic and hexatonic by varying only the pitch of the uppermost string. Hexatonic predominates, and vocally he extends his range of pitches beyond those of his *bukantiit*. Instrumentally he makes only occasional use of intervals larger than a fourth, unlike players such as Kisinja, Charlis Naibei Kinyokye, Isaac Kiboi Mutios, Mwene Simoto, and Thomas Mutios Ndiwa.⁸⁹ This results in a greater harmonic predictability for the vocalist, and may be why the response sections of his songs employ part-singing more frequently than the secular traditional songs, particularly sequences of thirds and fourths that mirror the part movement of the *bukantiit*.

Mang'esoy's vocal line interacts with the *bukantiit* in much the same way as found in secular songs, sometimes paralleling the upper instrumental line, but more

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⁸⁸ Agawu, 1987:412. The patterns most commonly used on the *kiiraanchiinek* are given in chapter 3.3.2.

⁸⁹ Compare *Makerkey :teng'eeek* (CM 123A:169-220, CD:34) and Kisinja's clan song (40A:294-340, CD:27), both in Appendix II.



often inserting comments of contrasting melodic material. His main area of diversity is adding the concept of verse and chorus as in *Makerkeey :teng'eeek* (a setting of The Parable of the Sower) given in chapter 7.3. The similarities between this and the *Rubiichooto* song in 7.3.1 (39B:163-207) are that each has stanzas of four lines.

Mang'esoy's song form differs from traditional patterns in that both 'verse' and 'chorus' are treated with call and response alternations. It has also been noted that the use of mirrored call and response in traditional songs is unusual, whereas in Mang'esoy's songs this is common. The form tends to be A A¹ B B² as the responses are usually extended with an additional pulse at the end, meaning Mang'esoy uses similar phrase length varieties as found in secular traditional songs. His call and response phrase divisions can be divided one to one between solo and response,⁹⁰ or be a single-phrase call answered by a triple-phrase response as in *Makerkeey :teng'eeek*. The latter also uses uneven division of metrical pulse divisions.⁹¹

A problem that has emerged in analysis is the occasional variance in Mang'esoy's choice of tonal centre, as seen in song CM 123A:169-220 which places the tonal centre on the upper pitch of the first fourth rather than the upper pitch of the second. This appears to be clearly intended. The song is also unusual in that the vocal line is almost identical to the *bukantiit* rather than introducing new motifs in a more extemporised fashion. It is similar in style to many of the first workshop songs and may in fact be an early composition of Mang'esoy's.

Performers such as Hilary Tirob, Bernard Chuma and Mang'esoy all say they do not 'compose' songs but add new words to existing melodies. A certain amount of poetic licence enables these to fit a given format, but small changes in melodic shape and rhythm are inevitable. All are careful to choose traditional songs that have no unacceptable associative memories that might send a counter-message in a church context.

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⁹⁰ Song CM 129B:252-315.

⁹¹ Further examples of unequal phrase divisions include CM 128 B:19-80 (Bernard Chuma) and CM 129B:221-251 (Mang'esoy).

### 8.2.2 Hymns and choruses

Again this is only a brief overview, but more will emerge in the workshop discussions later in this chapter. The first difference between traditional style songs and the more western-orientated church song repertoire of the Sabaot is the range of pitches. Although the choruses from the *Tyëenwookik chëë /kiikoostëë Yëyiin* Church of Christ hymnal are based on pentatonic or hexatonic systems, most subsequent church hymnody is constructed on the diatonic heptatonic system. This has alternating major and minor thirds as opposed to the predominant patterns of fourths characterising penta- and hexatonic:



It is perhaps significant that the more popular of these hymns and choruses maintain the whole-tone rule of traditional melodic patterns.

As with traditional songs, the vocal line of hymns and choruses can be sung by one or more singers, either with or without harmonisation. The differences are that some churches will have a choir that leads all the songs, whilst others will rely on the church leader or another singer to start a song before the congregation joins in, in itself a variant of call and response. When harmonisation does occur, it is often very simple and restricted to two parts such as the addition of a bass line of sustained tonic or dominant pitches at the closing of a phrase. Whether this reflects a preference on the part of the Sabaot for two rather than four-part singing is not established:

Sabaot church song *Rubiichoto* (from *Tyëenwookik chëë /Kiikoostëë Yëyiin*, No. 45).

$\text{♩} = 116$   
Group

Div.  
Nyoo ki - kii - sōō - tē ku - le chur - taat i - nee mii sin. - Bē - syōō - syēk tu - kul ku - mii kwēē - nuu - nyooa cheek

Most denominations are keen to introduce instruments into their times of worship, but there are still many rural churches that sing unaccompanied owing to

instruments not being available. In order of prevalence, I have encountered *kiriinkoonik* of varying sizes, *chuukaasinek*, guitars and very occasionally a battery-operated keyboard. The *bukantiit* is rarely used in churches, and neither is the *filimbi* owing to its connection with circumcision preparations.

Examination of melodic contour shows differences in shape between church songs and traditional ones. Few church songs make use of the high start and falling cascade, tending instead to have an undulating line close to the tonal centre as in the example above. Structurally, the phrases tend to be of equal division, often repeated many times without variation until everyone knows their part and can join in.⁹²

Rhythms occur in metrical patterns of three, and syncopations are more common than in traditional songs, particularly amongst youth groups who enjoy experimenting with rhythmic combinations. As in the majority of churches in Kenya, handclapping is now prevalent in Sabaot choruses, but adopts an unvarying pulse that is closer to the Sabaot drum pattern. Rather than indicating points of stress, it acts more as a reference point or "organising principle upon which songs are based",⁹³ and has been helpful when ascertaining compound metrical divisions in Sabaot songs.

Other changes in performance styles have been encouraged by the various choir competitions that are so popular in Kenya, resulting in contrasting fast and slow sections in songs, block changes in dynamics from loud to soft, and use of *ritardando* to mark closure. The overall tempi of songs remain consistent with traditional styles although the youth may push their songs a little faster. These practices have developed to such an extent that many Sabaot musicians below the age of thirty now think of them as common to all Sabaot music.

Despite being a genre associated with new concepts and ways of life, hymns and choruses of today are often less adventurous in their metrical organisation than much of the traditional repertoire. There is a noticeable reduction in the complexity of contrasting rhythms and phrases, but it is uncertain whether such complexity is still regarded as important by the Sabaot. As a result, young musicians who are now

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⁹² Phrases can also be of a more irregular distribution as in an example sung by a group of SDA youths, 2A:74-87, CD:31.

⁹³ A.M.Jones, 1954:26, 39.

more exposed to church songs are now finding it increasingly difficult to join in some of the traditional ceremonial songs, particularly those with frequent changes in metre.⁹⁴

### **8.3 Testing of concepts and analysis**

Having identified some of the features pertaining to Sabaot traditional music that set this particular system apart from other musics being used by the Sabaot, it has been necessary to ascertain whether these are still considered sufficiently important or idealistically symbolic by Sabaot musicians. I have fully expected there to be greater and lesser degrees of centrality among the features of the Sabaot musical repertory, including aspects of musical behaviour and conceptualisation.

Describing how this has been carried out leads me to a very different stage in this write-up, that of the workshop scenario. As well as evaluating the data collected on a one-to-one basis during this research, I have sought a means for more practical group interaction with musicians, potential musicians and community leaders. The number of traditional music-making opportunities left in the Sabaot way of life is decreasing, so the workshop concept has been one means of gathering people together. Jointly we have discussed the differences and compatibility between styles of music, their respective values and the practical options that lie ahead for music amongst the Sabaot.⁹⁵

The Sabaot who have assisted me in this research may appear a homogenous group in societal terms, but in musical terms, there has been a considerable range of skills amongst those attending workshops, from master player to total beginner. It is easy to generalise concerning the skills of those attending workshops, but I hope my comments will be seen as mindful of this diversity.

Amongst the Sabaot, it is still the case that for new ideas to take root, they need the approval of the arena in which they will be used. The context is the community, but increasingly it is also the church. The rapid growth in the number of churches on Mount Elgon is influencing not only the present development of music amongst the Sabaot, but also community opinion. They have become the sounding

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⁹⁴ A frequent comment from both young and old participants in workshops.

⁹⁵ See earlier comments in chapter 1.6.4.

board in matters of culture, taking the place of more traditional leadership and decision-making bodies, and it is important to include church leaders in every culturally-orientated discussion.⁹⁶

I do not claim that the use of workshops is the only way forward. Musicians such as Mang'esoy and Chuma Mulunda have been active in developing traditional Christian songs for a number of years, but have faced an incoming tide of urban worship songs. Euba (1970:54) believes outside musical resources introduce an element of variation that is "underplayed in African traditional music" but in the case of the Sabaot, variation is underplayed because the traditional host is drowning. It is gradually being recognised by Sabaot musicians that if their youth are ever to accept the reintroduction of more traditional song styles for recreational and church use, there needs to be either a new Sabaot style to emerge or else a blending of 'town' style with elements of traditional.

Specific findings in relation to concepts and analysis are related in the next section, but here the focus is on ways in which the testing of analytical data was organised in these group sessions. I began by inviting participants to consider some of the structural differences between hymns and traditional styles, and thankfully, discussions on music in general proved highly popular and there was no shortage of opinions. They described church songs as having slower, more prolonged sounds versus faster ones in traditional styles; they differentiated vocal ranges as being high or low; and categorised songs by function and whether they had instruments.⁹⁷

It was evident that many participants had an instinctive discernment of tuning sequences, intervals, and rising and falling phrases. They used hand movements and drawings to demonstrate their understanding of whether phrase shapes were falling, undulating, rising, smooth or leaping. When the strings of *bukantiinek* with penta- and hexatonic tunings were plucked in turn, participants could immediately differentiate the pitch contrasts. However, isolating lexical intonation and inflexions was an exercise new to many, as was identifying rhythmic metre and phrase lengths.

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⁹⁶ See Appendix IV.

⁹⁷ A young musician called Joseph Morongo listened to a recording of a traditional entertainment song played by Kisinja, followed by a song that he himself had composed in the more recent style. His comments were simply "Kisinja's sound is high, mine is low, he has an instrument, I don't, he sang fast, I was slower".

Since the message of a song is so important to the Sabaot, the early stages of each workshop were spent deciding how a given text in the Sabaot language should best be used. Although I asked the participants to work as a group in order to give the less experienced among them more confidence, I realise the group approach is not the customary way for most composers to make a song. Fortunately it caused no problems as people realised the purpose behind such an exercise.

I asked them to first consider the metrical pattern and natural stresses that emerged from speaking the text aloud, and then to think of melodic shapes that suggested themselves from the natural rise and fall of the text.⁹⁸ My choice of such a method was based on the premise that lexical tone influences choice of musical tones in Sabaot. It is also known that in speech, people instinctively use tone and intonation that is based on scaling principles, and although not transferable in every instance as a melodic equivalent, there are sufficient examples of such a relationship in other languages for it not to be ignored here.⁹⁹

In the process of reciting the text, the group experiments with stress, use of pauses and repetition of key words, as well as listening for intonation and grammatical tone that convey clarity of understanding. They also consider intonation used in conveying questions, intensity and prominence. As the inherent 'melody' contained within the natural rise and fall of the words becomes more evident, one or more melodies begin to suggest themselves to various members of the group. Chapter 7.3.1 examines the linguistic and vocal tone relationship using a text taken from Matthew 5:3-4, and in addition to this, an example of progression from text to song of Luke 4:41 is included on the accompanying CD:¹⁰⁰

*Kiibēbētooy (mbo)tāmirmirook chēē miyootēch chēē chaang lēyyē chēē  
kiiyiimē biiko alak lēyyē. Yu chuwunēē :tāmirmiroochoo miyootēch biiko,  
lēyyē. Kuwookyinē barak, kumwoochinē, Yēesu kule, "Iyeku :inyiing, ēē,  
lekwetaab Yēyiin! Lēyyē!"* (text of Luke 4:41)

⁹⁸ This method of using spoken words to inspire a melody is described by D. Dargie (1983:11-17) and is also the basis of other musical forms such as plainchant, the medieval church music whose groupings of notes resemble the free rhythm of prose.

⁹⁹ See Brown's comments in 2000:280-300 on global and local level speech processes and ref. Lerdahl's work on cognitive restraints in musical composition (1988). Scaling occurs within autosegmental theory, referring to a speaker's intentional use of a discrete pitch range in speech, and the correlation of this with other speakers of the same language (Brown, *ibid.*:282).

¹⁰⁰ Recitation of text is CD:36 (30A:17-24, 26-29), and resulting song is CD:37 (30A:35-54).



In the case of large groups attending workshops, these were sub-divided to create more than one version of the same text, and the results were interesting in that they mirrored the different natures of prevailing song styles. This is why, in Appendix II, two versions of John 3:16 are included, one based on a more traditional format and the other using guitar.¹⁰¹

*Kicham :Yēyiin kōōrooni miisin kut kukōōn lekwenyii nyooto akeenke baateey  
sukung'eet :chii ake tukul nyoo ikoosēē keey lakwanaa mēēbērē mākubot,  
teenee mākunyōōr soboontaab kibchuulyo. (text of John 3:16)*

Although these two songs have not been compared for correlating use of stress and tone,¹⁰² it can be seen that the more traditional-styled version has a very different phrase contour, metrical layout, mode and use of vocal effects than the second song. In the latter, the typical downward cascade of melodic contour is replaced by an undulating line whose highest point has shifted to the second phrase.

Most of the workshop participants had never tried 'making'¹⁰³ a song before, but of those with previous composing experience, the majority were more accustomed to starting with a fragment of melody in mind and then adding words. The idea of adhering closely to a given text was another new concept, but its value was noted when a number of free-interpretation song texts were found to have errors. It was pointed out by a participant that such errors are particularly important to avoid in areas where few in the congregation own their own Bible and cannot always read it for themselves.

A discussion on whether the composers of new songs should be acknowledged revealed that ownership is still a difficult concept for the Sabaot who until recently have always considered songs as belonging to the person who sings it for that moment only. This may also explain why the idea of committing to a process of developing their own music is a little strange to them, as it requires a large-scale sense of ownership with a view to the future. Yet many of them have willingly adopted the church styles of worship, perhaps not realising the concept behind such an action.

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¹⁰¹ Ref. traditional style (44A:312-337, CD:38) and guitar version (44A:341-389). Both are in Appendix II.

¹⁰² I was unable to check the text of the second song with a mother tongue speaker.

¹⁰³ A term that is more easily understood by Sabaot than 'composing'.

Group dynamics during times of song composition reveal there is an expectation that one person will provide the initial musical idea and a group response will subsequently develop. Many contributed their understanding of how particular phrases could be used, and each of these musical formulas needed to be tried. In some cases the group would defer to the ideas of a respected elder, but in others, the younger people took the lead. Once everyone felt more confident about their musical contributions, they were asked to work individually on making new songs and developing their own ideas.

After a period of time that ranged from hours to days, everyone brought their songs to the wider group, having first rehearsed the response and instrument sections (if used) with other participants. A joint critiquing session then ensued as to whether the song was well structured, made good use of text and encouraged people to 'move'. Ideas for developing songs and being more creative in presentation grew as the workshop progressed, and many songs changed considerably as the singers worked on them.

After amendments and more rehearsing, participants took their songs back home with them, looking for opportunities to sing to a wider audience. They also took with them an audio recording to remind them of all that had transpired in the workshop. Many claimed they needed this to help them to remember their songs, and although the sight of audio technology is often enough to trigger such desires, one is conscious that not so many years previous, people would have easily remembered the songs without the help of a tape recorder. The implications are that either their oral skills of retention and transmission are weakening through increasing reliance on written materials, or these new songs are more difficult to remember because they are relatively unfamiliar. I suspect a combination, but there is a danger that the retention skills needed for music diminish as people focus on literacy.

### **8.3.1 Workshop findings**

The song workshops held amongst the Sabaot have confirmed that knowledge of traditional songs is becoming more specialised and therefore in potential jeopardy concerning future use. While some of the participants are still able to identify and utilise traditional song features, many others are uncertain how to proceed, either

through lack of familiarisation or confusion with other music genres. In identifying this, I owe much to Mang'esoy, Kisinja and the Mutios brothers who have contributed valuable comments during the review sessions. There are some strong criticisms of composition efforts here, but they have been made by the participants and teachers themselves, and all accept the intent to have been constructive.

One of the concepts I had hoped to test was the extent of similarity between linguistic morphemes (the 'minimal distinctive unit of grammar, or a concept which interrelates such notions as root, prefix, etc')¹⁰⁴ and musical morphemes or musemes. This proved too extensive a topic to cover here, but it is clear that the Sabaot language and traditional music have specific identifying features, some of which have been covered in chapter seven. The idea has been scaled down to a more external view, and the following comments relate to this.

Initially, participants felt that church music was a totally foreign idiom in their midst that could never sit comfortably alongside traditional music.¹⁰⁵ These were two separate worlds that required people to make a choice as to which they would enter. However, as various songs from both genres were examined in the workshops, impressions began to change as participants noticed that bridges already existed. Chordophones were used in both (guitar and *bukantiit*), and structures were similar (call and response, repetition of sections). There was also some evidence that performers of church songs were retaining traditional processes of music making, such as the avoidance of half-steps mentioned earlier.¹⁰⁶

Investigations of text-use in songs showed that many younger Sabaot were unfamiliar with two aspects: setting the scene of a story line, and achieving poetic flow in a melodic context. They were unsure how to achieve a semi-improvisatory feel or to expound a theme in a creative manner that would convince their audience. Taking the group critique session of a new song as an example,¹⁰⁷ listeners felt the text, although true to the given passage, made little sense without setting the scene in the opening stanza and clarifying that it was Jesus and not the singer who was rebuking the demons.

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¹⁰⁴ Definition taken from Crystal, 1991:223.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Nettl's theory (1985:44) that these similarities enable syncretism to take place more easily.

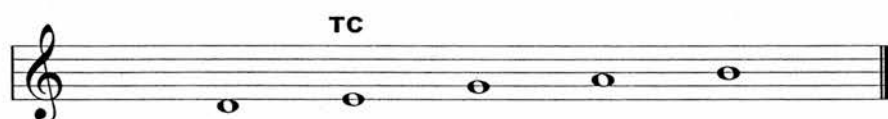
¹⁰⁶ Kauffman (1972) had similar findings in Shona urban music.

¹⁰⁷ Song 30A:35-54, Appendix II and CD:37.

Difficulties of poetic use emerged in song 47A:122-134, which again followed the text almost to the letter but was considered to be inflexible and of little impact.¹⁰⁸ Poetic flow, it was decided, should be achieved through a combination of phrase lengths, syllabic rhythm and choice of vocabulary.

Unlike traditional songs where the vocal part is dictated to some extent by the number of syllables contained in each phrase of text, church choruses have simple combinations of words that require minimal adjustment within the melody line. In another new song, 47A:122-134 (CD:39), the solo singer was uncertain how to develop a series of entries, and after a promising start, became increasingly monodic. In blunt fashion, this was declared to be "weak and tasteless" by the traditional musicians on the workshop, particularly when contrasted with the creativeness of another workshop song where the solo singer imitated the rapid plucking on the *bukantiit* with a similar rhythm in rapid sung syllables.¹⁰⁹

Uncertainties continued to emerge in the relationship between vocal line and *bukantiit*. Although the intention was to create songs using elements of traditional style, a trait was emerging in the chordophone part, regardless of whether intended for *bukantiit* or guitar. The vocal melody line was being mirrored throughout by the instrument,¹¹⁰ and the resulting absence of contra-melodies meant the instrumental part had become incidental to the harmonic structure. Song 44A:312-337 provoked heated debate on this issue, with some suggesting the origin of the melody used in this song was the culprit. It was not felt to be Sabaot, and others said it was constructed with another string instrument in mind and could not be adapted to the *bukantiit*. The only solution would have been for the *bukantiit* player to retune to a lower sequence of pitches and thus enable the addition of a second line below the melody:

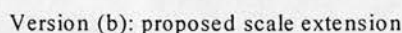


Version (a): Scale and *bukantiit* tuning of workshop song 44A:312-337.

¹⁰⁸ Written out in chapter 7.3.1.

¹⁰⁹ Ref. song 45A:364-405, CD:41.

¹¹⁰ For example, songs 30A:35-54 (CD:37) and 44A:312-337 (CD:38), both in Appendix II.



The moving of the tonal centre in the above example (44A:312-337) was decided by the older musicians to be a mistake, but in defence of the composers present, this song represented the efforts of a single participant. Time is also likely to have been a factor, as Mang'esoy has said it can take him years before he is happy with a new song. More significantly, he has suggested that the influence of other music systems and lack of exposure to traditional music is causing the difficulties young Sabaoth musicians now have with the more complex compositional rules such as tonal centring and instrumental range.

It has been ascertained from reactions to a demonstration of different tunings on the *bukantiit*, that players have personal preferences for either pentatonic or hexatonic. However, there has been no indication as yet that players who alternate between playing the *bukantiit* and the guitar are adjusting the tuning of one to the other, although frustration is evident amongst younger Sabaoth who desire the fuller range of the guitar.

In response sections of songs, many of the workshop compositions now use polyphony for entire phrases, but retain a similar predominance of parallel fourths



and thirds as in traditional *bukantiit* parts.¹¹¹ Metrical divisions are often indicated by a lead singer conducting during the performance, and a growing number of songs now have metrical groupings of three rather than two,¹¹² although retaining the same rhythmic patterns on percussive instruments as in traditional songs.

With song structures, there appears to be growing preference for non-narrative forms, whilst in call and response songs, the solo vocal sections are often limited to the first part of a four-part phrase group rather than being ongoing interjections of uneven lengths between response sections. This can be represented as follows:

A	B C D	(as in song 30A:35-54, Appendix II, CD:37)
Solo	Response	

The reduction in interaction is even more pronounced in church songs, which tend to be sung by the entire group with only an occasional solo insertion fitted between phrases.¹¹³ The possibility of 'Sabaotising' these to a greater extent than simply translating the text into Sabaot has brought suggestions ranging from adding response sections to considering how the melodic line and presentation could be improved.

Participants have clearly enjoyed being able to try out ideas in workshops, whether in groups or individually, and one such song exemplifies a very different approach. It sandwiches a contrasting 'chorale'-like section between two more traditional styled sections,¹¹⁴ being the singers' unprompted response to wanting the best from both worlds, Sabaot traditional and church hymnody. Although the first impression is that new chorale-like material has been introduced in the mid-section, it is not thematically independent and the two *bukantiinek* continue unchanged throughout the song in a binary structure of A B A¹ B¹. However, the change in voice from male to female and the adoption of a smoother articulation signals an unmistakable change in intent. The rhythm of the song is compound triple over simple triple (in the tambourine part which enters later) and syncopated.

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¹¹¹ For example, 47A:122-134, Appendix II, CD:39.

¹¹² For example, song 30B:3-95, in which the beater plays the following rhythm throughout: ♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪.

¹¹³ As in 39B:163-207, Appendix II, CD:32.

¹¹⁴ Song 48B:122-196, Appendix II, CD:40.



Participants were aware that the majority of their new songs were aimed at a church context, so it was not unnatural that the first few songs in the workshops were relatively restrained in performance, with the singers refraining from body movements or vocables. Later they began to experiment with adding traditional dance actions which they now termed "jumping to the Lord". Mime, grunts and various vocables were also added, although some church denominations refrained owing to their doctrinal beliefs. They also decided that the technique of a second singer asking questions in some of the traditional narratives was equally effective in songs teaching about Scripture.¹¹⁵

The main implications of this research will be left for the final chapter, but a few words are needed to conclude the workshop approach and in particular, to outline some difficulties encountered. I am left with no doubts as to the effectiveness of workshops for gathering and testing materials, and what has been particularly encouraging is that the response of the vast majority of participants has been positive and enthusiastic, with attendees claiming 'ownership' of both the process and the outcome. Those that remained doubtful were either deeply involved in promoting other genres of music or were committed to the church's teaching on cultural matters.

Two problems have occurred amongst the Sabaot with checking of tonality and pitch analysis. Firstly, they appear to relate their understanding of whether a pitch is rising or falling to broader factors than just the preceding or succeeding melodic environments. This may explain why many players of the *bukantiit* were unable to sing the pitches of their strings without first humming a song to provide a 'reference point'.¹¹⁶ Those that identified intervals correctly without such references had studied music at school.

Secondly, Feld (1980:575) points out that the context in which testing is carried out may override the informants' response. If a particular feature does not re-occur in isolated testing, this does not necessarily prove it is inessential to the musical structure. Whilst I was checking intervals amongst the Sabaot, there were several instances where singers responded in ways that proved emic status but were in fact attempts to please the tester. Enthusiastic 'noddors' were sometimes rounded

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¹¹⁵ Workshop example is song 45A:364-405, CD:41.

¹¹⁶ See chapter 8.1.1 for further reference to this, also Herskovits, 1941(i):19.

on by other participants who felt otherwise, but in the early stages of workshops everyone was more restrained in their reactions, uncertain of how any disagreement would be perceived. Feld rightly states that testing needs to allow for the variability of "performance-related form alterations" such as the manner of singing when in the presence of the opposite sex, the location, the size of group, or the position of the song in relation to a longer sequence of songs. This does not, however, always solve the tester's problem.

As said at the start of this section, there have been many salutary reminders during these workshops that the collective memories of the Sabaot traditional song genre are becoming blurred, in some cases, beyond restitution. Some are even finding it difficult to distinguish between a true Sabaot traditional melody and one borrowed from elsewhere, as shown in the Saboti workshop. Here participants assured me a particular song that had been set to a new text was "one hundred percent Sabaot", but Mang'esoy later pronounced it to be based on a Pokot melody and dance, closer in style to Turkana music in the northern area of Kenya. It was not possible to verify this further, so I mention it only to draw attention to a possible problem.

Although these workshops have uncovered some painful implications, they also remind us of a deeper truth: the Sabaot still love to sing and dance, no matter to what extent their attitudes are shaped by other forces. That their music will change over the coming years is certain, but with this comes a sense of urgency that drives me to record a traditional genre that may disappear forever. The *mēliilto* and *ng'ētunyto* songs are a case in point, and other categories are likely to follow.

Finally, even though this research will always be incomplete, it has at least begun to raise awareness of music development in homes and churches across the mountain. The Sabaot responses to their musical dilemma constitute the concluding chapter in this thesis, and hopefully there will be much more to report in coming years.

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## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

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*/Kēētiyē ntootyanteet ku māmāluul.*

Support the banana tree before it falls.

(Foresight is better than hindsight).

Sabaot proverb

### 9.1 Findings

Much of this thesis has been concerned with examining actuality of life amongst the Sabaot and how this in turn impacts on their musical choices. The findings constitute an applied ethnomusicological case for managing future change in Sabaot music, showing how people can consciously take the future development of their music into their own hands.

What has emerged from the documentation of Sabaot traditional song repertoire is that their system is culture-specific and has significant links with the *bukantiit* in aspects of pitch and polyphonic movement. It also strongly relates to a way of life that existed long before Christianity came to the mountain, and as such, there can be no certainty whether it will continue to have a meaningful role in Sabaot society. There are indications that incoming musical intrusions amongst the Sabaot may be sufficient to stifle their entire traditional music system, but what is more certain is that the communicative values of traditional songs will diminish unless their use in alternative contexts is better understood.

Of the social mechanisms that are influential in the introduction and dissemination of innovation on the mountain, the more obvious are the church, audio-media and education. Tourism is minimal in this area so provides little incentive for a musical response. Although many Sabaot see media and education as obvious sources of new concepts, a surprising number do not consider the same of the church. Neither do they necessarily realise that their traditional music is an expression unique to their own culture.

The concept of individual ownership is also relatively weak in Sabaot social settings, and this may be a reason why the responsibilities of promoting cultural 'image' are poorly defined. Although the traditional patterns of leadership structure are

strong, issues relating to music use are now decided more by the youth than the elders. A workshop participant commented that no Sabaot political leader of the present seems bothered about culture, but the counter to this is that there is nothing preventing musical initiatives being taken by non-leaders as the desire to sing is not something that is strongly licensed or controlled.

There are few signs that any significant interaction is taking place between the various music systems, and most Sabaot remain highly selective as to which one they will adopt. The musics of traditional ceremonies, dance and church settings possess such different ratings of social significance amongst the Sabaot that mutual co-existence of these genres is increasingly vulnerable. If the current compartmentalisation continues, any possibility of bi-musicality (skills in one or more music systems) will become increasingly remote. Furthermore, it aggravates the effects of other change factors that are already weakening the social cohesion between generations.

In chapter one I mentioned searching for bridges between incoming music genres and those already in place. In considering whether traditional songs have valid church applications, it is evident there are a number of bridges already waiting to be recognised. For those who are cautious concerning change, traditional song styles bring the advantage of familiarity, whilst their use of call and response is a recognised structure of verbal reinforcement. Group orientation also encourages involvement. Their structure fits well in principle with the mother tongue, and they are idiomatic in that they incorporate free-flowing narrative and various vocal effects that are part of everyday speech. There are very few events not recognised in traditional song, so inclusion of a wide range of church teaching is a natural progression. Likewise, the entire person is drawn into a song through the use of body movements that have no similarities with other secular dance styles considered so offensive by the church.

The opposite to bridging is to build a retaining wall, the opinion of Sourindro Mohun Tagore who could attribute few positives towards musical change.¹ He believed that his own Indian heritage was degraded through incorporation of new

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¹ Ref. Capwell, 1991:228-243. Tagore is described as musicologist, educationist and patron of Indian music in *NGDMM*, vol.6.

directions, and therefore in need of rehabilitation and restitution to its past greatness. However, if such a preservation of musical heritage were advocated amongst the Sabaot, it would greatly widen the rift that is already apparent and cause resentment and further rejection amongst the musically curious.

Neither do my findings support Chesaina's view (1991:viii) that traditional songs will mean the same to people today as they have done in previous generations. With its cultural context now crumbling, the traditional genre has to adapt if it is to survive. Without such adaptation, many young people will no longer be interested in the older music and instruments, regarding them as worthless and inferior. There may also be an unspoken belief that "old-fashioned" music represents the less educated or lower classes.²

It remains the case that in considering the interaction of change processes with cultural music models, there is still much that ethnomusicologists need to learn, particularly in predicting change from current trends. Blacking (1986:4) points out that "cultures are 'floating resources' which people invoke and re-invent in the course of social interaction", and even though human agencies can instigate changes and the extent can be predicted from similar patterns elsewhere, it can never be a certainty. This is because change also occurs below the level of consciousness, at the cultural psyche or intuitive level.

When considering the features of both old and new music systems, I have been mindful of Russell's findings (1982) that young people rather than older are more likely to converge and adopt speech features from outside their customary sphere of use. This phenomenon has now crossed over into Sabaot music but in a manner that far exceeds Russell's 'marker' classification. Rather than small changes being adopted into the pre-existing traditional music genre, the Sabaot youth and more particularly those in churches have taken up alternative music styles in their entirety. Blacking (1986:9) calls this "radical change" or real musical change as distinguished from "variation and innovation within a system".

The implication is that the direction in Sabaot music today is not towards fusion and syncretism of traditional with more recent styles, but the substitution of

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² Source: Alfred Chemaget, Cheptais.

traditional with entirely different genres. It is this which has become a means of gaining recognition, approval and integration into another new setting, a social sphere that is noticeably reduced of elders. However, knowing that there is still a deep-seated respect for elders instilled through the Sabaot social structure, it is possible that younger people are not beyond rethinking their attitude towards the music of their parents.

How the process will develop in the present environment with minimal support and encouragement is not the place of this thesis to speculate, but it is evident that Sabaot traditional music is capable of flexing and accommodating new ideas if necessary. There are no signs as yet that any specific changes have taken permanent root, but even if they should, such borrowing is not necessarily corrupting the original. On the linguistic side, Haddad (1983) has shown that while the Swahili language has enriched itself by extensively borrowing from the Arabic lexicon, its phonological, morphological, and syntactic structures have remained entirely Bantu in nature, and therefore, it is plausible that the same might be true for music.

My thinking has often hinged on the partnership factor between music and language, believing that identification and utilisation of such partnerships is another important strengthening factor that will benefit both these systems.³ It is clear that Sabaot music and language have commonalities in tonal, symbolic and structural aspects, and this has been verbalised by several workshop participants after examining the parallels in phrasing and stress patterns between their mother tongue and traditional music. The Sabaot are already aware of the value of using their mother tongue, partly due to the promotional work of SBTL, and this in turn could provide a considerable encouragement to their indigenous music development if the partnership were to be better highlighted.

Another observation from song workshops is that although young people are increasingly eager to write their song texts on paper, this is not happening with traditional songs. At a time when it should be possible to keep account of their own musical heritage, these songs remain entrusted to the memories of older non-literate members of the community. Elbourne's comment that "the disintegration and

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³ See chapter 1.5.



disappearance of indigenous music happens most frequently in non-literate societies" (1975:183) should not apply to a group of people such as the Sabaot who are now leaving non-literate status behind them. Yet in linking their traditional song styles to a sector of the community having the weakest literacy skills, the disappearance of these songs continues. If the Sabaot are serious about wanting to forestall this, then other means of heritage safe-keeping need to be found.

I should add that the ability to read and write a written form of language has often been viewed as a necessary first step in maintaining and promoting use of that language, but I do not see the value in equating this with the transcription of music. Only a very few Sabaot will have access to such notational skills, whereas writing song texts is already within the means of many. Whether or not this happens, performance and actual usage is likely to remain more important than marks on paper.

There is a persistent trend in ethnomusicology towards the idea that culture develops chronologically from the simple to the complex, meaning the simplest songs are the oldest.⁴ However, I would argue that such overtones of evolution theory have no substantiation in music use amongst the Sabaot today. Although the number of pitches in Sabaot traditional songs now using the diatonic scale *could* be greater, they often restrict themselves to similar ranges as those found in pentatonic and hexatonic songs. They also adhere to many of the same 'rules' of intervallic relationships. It appears, therefore, that it is not the pitches that determine complexity here, but the use of structural variation, vocal ornamentation and text. Of the more recent Sabaot diatonic church songs, most tend to use only two or three primary chords and have less adventurous rhythmic patterns than traditional songs.

When traditional and church song structures are compared, there is a marked difference in the use of variation within vocal parts. In a traditional *tyēēntaab saramEEK* twins song (*tuutu yaaya*),⁵ there are thirty-five identical response phrases and thirty four solo utterances. If 'a' is used to represent the response, it never occurs in any other form than 'a'. The soloist, on the other hand, has three basic shapes of 'b', 'c', and 'd', which are then subject to small variations of pitch or rhythm to give

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⁴ Ref. Nettl (1953:284) and Irvine and Sapir (1976:71-73).

⁵ Song 44B:59-100, Appendix II, CD:14.

seventeen additional shapes of  $b^1$ -  $b^{10}$ ,  $c^1$  and  $d^1$ -  $d^6$ . In addition, the order is also variable, with the one exception that 'c' can never follow 'd'.

Contrast this with a more recent song such as *Rubiichoto*⁶ where the group phrasing falls into regular phrase blocks of A B A C with minimal variation. The question that arises is whether this reduction in phrase development has any signification for the Sabaot, as at present it appears not to. There is a link in that both structures can be considered cyclical, but although the options for creativity are available in *Rubiichoto*, they are not taken up to any significant extent. The group sings throughout and the only opportunities used for a solo voice insertion are in the brief rests between the two phrases of the chorus stanza. It may be that 'complexity' is perceived by the Sabaot as the particular cultural rite or event that intricately links a song into their socio-cultural life patterns. The equivalent notion in a church song would therefore be the linking of the message to their understanding and experience of God.

Two aspects that will need further investigation are mentioned here. The first is the extent to which the development of Sabaot traditional song styles has resulted from interchange between groupings that share geographical, cultural and social parameters. This cluster concept is currently being recognised in those situations where language shift is evident but the vernacular is still of value, and it is believed to be a gateway towards more rapid identification of language research strategies.⁷ If the concept is transferred to music systems, such clusters may respond to corporate strengthening strategies or better dissemination of musicological knowledge across a wider area.

In the case of Sabaot music, the corresponding possibilities could be a joint investigation of the music of Kalenjin language groups of North Tugen, Endo, Nandi, Pökoot, Elgeyo, Kipsigis, Marakwet, Cherangany and Terik.⁸ However, as noted in chapter two, the Kalenjin classification is relatively recent and it would be more relevant to investigate links in the musical instrument migratory perspective and in

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⁶ Song 39B:163-207, Appendix II, CD:32.

⁷ Ref. Strategy Formulation Task Force paper (SIL, 2001).

⁸ This could also be extended to Kalenjin groups within Tanzania such as Aramanik, Mediak, Kisankasa and Mosiro, as well as the Uganda groups of Kupsabiny and Pökoot.

song development within the Nilotic family, extending across the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania. One of the earliest aims of this research was to compare findings of the Sabaot and the Datooga languages, the latter found in the Singida and Mbulu regions of Tanzania and being linguistically related to Sabaot. This proved impossible owing to a sensitive situation at the time of research permit applications.

The second aspect for further investigation relates to traditional song text use, and in respect to symbolism, a few texts have been included in various parts of this thesis. However, these are too few in number to make any definitive statement concerning the eliciting of deeper meanings, and it is beyond the scope of this study to conduct poetic analysis of literacy forms. Neither can it be determined whether the move away from traditional songs is having any long-term effect on language use, although Mang'esoy has already commented on the loss of poetic flow in some workshop examples. There could be many reasons for this, including lack of experience in making a song, and there is no solid evidence that it is a constant problem. However, experimenting in song texts through the inclusion of rap and other catch phrases is now emerging in the larger urban centres of Kenya, and similar trends are likely to spread to rural localities.

## **9.2 Present responses**

In summarising the management Sabaot people have over musical change in their midst, I begin with responses that they are already exhibiting. Many non-churched elders consider non-traditional music as unimportant, some find it offensive, others try to ignore it. Few seem to realise how quickly it is now influencing wider attitudes towards the social role of music use in their midst, and although they complain at the demise of traditional song styles, they do little to prevent the situation from escalating. At the same time, churches apply increasing pressure to have their worship styles take root on the mountain, whilst yet another group of mostly young people are captivated by media promotions of urban dance styles.

Church beliefs concerning traditional practices on Mount Elgon are very strong, but represent more the thinking of the wider African church than local

churches. Beneath this institutional veneer lie core values that still serve to identify the Sabaot people, although rethinking the expression of this 'Sabaotness' will take encouragement. More importantly, it will require courage and the desire to go against the flow of other influences. The concept of power and human agency will mean Sabaot seeking out new ways to allow their values to resurface, and in the case of music, perhaps ceasing to placidly accept that traditional music is not appropriate in the church. The following is a very typical response:

"If someone gives me new clothes then I will wear them, but I'm not sure they are all that important to me as I am content with what I have. In the same way, people on the mountain may still be thinking about worshipping God in a Sabaot way, but they don't bother to do so because they have been given an alternative".⁹

This has many echoes in the church throughout Kenya, along with a reluctance to believe God's creative purpose in cultural variety.

There is already one response to show that songs can be meaningful in other contexts. From the Christian perspective, using song texts as vehicles of redemptive analogy has been a means of bringing two worlds together. The simplest example is that many traditional songs already praise the creator god of *Asiis* or *Cheebtaaaleel*, so it is not a vast concept shift to extend the creation aspect to the 'one true God' of *Yēyiin*.

Another example has appeared in the Cheptais workshop, January 2001, based on a traditional song that a mother will sing to her children in the home to warn them that treachery leads to grief.¹⁰

The story is of two boys who are close friends, but the mother of one of them dies. Her son is adopted by the mother of the other boy, but when the issue of inheritance arises, she decides to throw him into a pit to die. The boy that remains is very sad, but one day he passes by the pit and hears someone crying. He rushes home to tell his mother, but she evades the issue. The child returns to the pit and hears crying again, so he persuades other people to listen. They lift a big stone in its depths and find the other boy has survived through eating soil. His hair has grown so long it is stuck to the stone, so the people cut him loose and then sacrifice a cow. The blood of the animal is given to the boy to drink and this causes him to vomit up the soil he has eaten.

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⁹ Bernard Chuma, interview 29/9/98.

¹⁰ Song 54A:263-275, called *Mureerenyoo*.

In the workshop, this same melody was used for the text of Peter disowning Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62), as the singers felt listeners would remember the original message about treachery leading to grief.¹¹ Those that were hearing the Scripture message for the first time had the full implications brought home in a far more meaningful and contextualised manner, particularly as most people knew the original song.

What is learnt through this experience is that if lingering doubts invoked through the use of traditional song styles are to be dispelled, the use of text must be clear with the original message imaginatively linked to a Biblical theme and contextualised in a clear manner. The listener should not be left hanging somewhere in a vulnerable no-man's-land between animism and Christianity. The catch, as Mang'esoy sees it, is that this approach takes both thought and hard work on the part of the composer, and people may not have the patience to allow time for their song to take shape.

I do not deny that some ceremonial songs may still retain too strong an associative link for the church to accept them in any form. However, if the Daasanach example in chapter 6.3 worked, even greater responses might be achieved if the same happened in a large and well established church. All that is needed is willingness to explore less strongly associative options for both songs and instruments.

In his approach to change in business and management, Kotter (1996:162) gives the entrepreneurial view that "major change is never successful unless the complacency level is low". The Sabaoth situation sends mixed signals in this respect. On the one hand there is a *laissez-faire* attitude where looking to anything other than the here-and-now is uncommon. Comments such as "let us give it another five decades and see what happens to the *bukantiit*",¹² or "even though the *bukantiit* is not heard so much today, it is safe underground"¹³ reveal complacency and fatalism. What is familiar will always continue to exist, but if it does cease, then that is part of life's

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¹¹ Song 54A:218-263.

¹² Charlis Naibei Kinyokye, interview 13/7/99.

¹³ Ndiwa.



plan and must be accepted. Many assume that the passing on or encouraging of traditional music skills can be left to someone else.

Of those who have attended a workshop, most realise that nothing will change in the existing musical trends unless an effort is made by the musicians themselves to tread new ground. Sitting back and either complaining or ignoring the situation is not going to change anything. Their internal motivations have been aroused, and their cognitive rigidity challenged. A large number of participants now appreciate that their traditional styles can be perfectly acceptable in alternative contexts, and they are realising that perceived blockages to merging cultural music and the church can be challenged:

"We translate or copy songs into Sabaot because there are no original traditional Sabaot Christian songs. These workshops have given us a lesson as we used to think the *bukantiit* could only be used for traditional songs, but now we can bring it into the church alongside the Swahili songs. What is confusing us is that when we joined the church we thought everything had to be new".¹⁴

It is evident that when the opportunity presents itself, such as a workshop where daily challenges are set concerning composition of new songs, traditionalist Sabaot musicians are open to innovation.¹⁵ Master *bukantiit* players have joined with guitarists, planning new compositions and looking for new ideas in presentation and structure of songs. Actual changes in playing style have been minimal, but the musicians have shown willingness towards further development, particularly after having defined and understood some of the actual cultural processes involved in music use.

It should be noted that the focus of these workshops has not been to promote innovation itself, but rather to highlight cultural issues and see what responses would come from the Sabaot. The nature and extent of such responses is not for me to dictate. I have tried to raise awareness in the participants of both the present and the potential scenario for music use on Mount Elgon, and although I admit my intentions have been proactive, my impact has deliberately been kept to a minimum. This is also the reason why the Chenoweth model of analysis has not been taken to the level of

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¹⁴ Bernard Chuma, Kobsiuro workshop.

¹⁵ Nettl's chapter on "Innovators" (1985:104-113) relates to how change is largely determined by the traditional attitude towards innovation.



regenerating melodic forms at this point in time. There are clearly plenty of active Sabaot composers who are eminently capable of creativity without the stimulus of generated materials.

In order for a group such as the Sabaot to have more control over changes in its modes of expression, those involved in the activity need to have a common understanding of the goals and direction. If that understanding is incomplete or the task is too great, the process of transformation may stall.¹⁶ It has been significant for workshop participants to see the processes of change presented as a sequence, enabling them to understand how one step can lead to other consequences. Several who clearly had no conviction about the renewed use of indigenous idioms at the start of a workshop completed the session with a very different vision.

However, people's responses to change factors are occurring at different rates. This means, according to Foster (1973:13), that eventually we are likely to see something of a compromise within the functional whole, and it is to be hoped that the same will occur in music systems. At present the signs are of capitulation rather than compromise, as incoming genres overwhelm the value perceptions of traditional music.

The lack of balance in the use of different music genres amongst the Sabaot cannot wholly be attributed to personal preference. The enjoyment of Sabaot musicians when they gather together to explore new uses for indigenous songs and instruments is evident, and there is no sign these songs are fading through dislike. The musical choice of church members may be taken to indicate their preference, but ideological factors are undoubtedly the stronger influence just as cultural factors influence the use of traditional music. To compound this, the expression of personal feelings is not always as it seems amongst the Sabaot. They are masters of self-control due to the many times in their lives when this is a social expectation, as for example, not showing pain during circumcision, hiding one's anger and never displaying public affection between adults of opposite sex.

The reality for younger musicians is that they are caught in a musical cross-current. Floyd (1999:189) notes in relation to northern Kenya lyres: "The performers

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¹⁶ Also the view of Kotter, 1996:100.

see themselves as being within the tributaries to the mainstream of popular music", and assimilation with guitar performance and construction traits is their desire. He terms this as an intentional working towards that with which performers can feel culturally comfortable, and indeed the guitar-*bukantiit* duo is a close parallel to this. However, I have seen only one such active duo (ref. plate 5a), and it seems unlikely that any such approach can continue to develop unless strategies to assist the *bukantiit* are suggested. Clearly there is an argument here for applied ethnomusicology identifying and supporting the formation of whatever means empower individuals and groups to realise their aesthetic and cultural needs.

### 9.2.1 Future choices

It would appear that owing to the extent of musical influences now pervading Sabaot society, juxtaposition through applied strategies (rather than retreat action) is needed if traditional styles are not to be submerged. There are some Sabaot who have already appreciated the importance of balance in other aspects of their lives. For example, Joseph Morongo relates of his family's departure from Uganda:

"The reason my father's family left Busoga is because we felt we were being totally assimilated. We were in the minority and no longer able to speak Sabaot, so we came home to the mountain. Here we should aim for two parallel rivers, rather than one that breaks its banks and overwhelms the other".

Although I hope the Sabaot will move towards an environment in which representatives of all music systems realise the options and can work together in identifying areas of compatibility, I accept this may not be the eventual outcome. Nonetheless, indications of the desire for better musical integration have been clearly visible in the five workshops held during this research period, encouraging me to believe this may be sustainable. Nketia's (1981:33) remark that "individuals who keep a social distance in certain contexts may come together in a musical context" is important in ethnomusicological thinking and has been well realised by the setting of such workshops, but other opportunities need to be found.

The temptation for me to speculate as to how music use will develop amongst the Sabaot needs to be resisted, not least because my assumptions concerning the direction of integration may discredit their integrity. I am mindful of Carrington

(1948:198-199) stating that European musical instruments would be unable to accompany African traditional music, but this is already disproved by the use of the guitar in combination with *bukantiit*.

Nevertheless, every workshop has ended with a brainstorming session in which participants have suggested ways to continue the momentum. I feel it is appropriate that I record these in combination with my own suggestions, on the understanding that the architects behind any future musical choices must now be the entire Sabaot community; not outsiders, and not the churches. An outward image cannot live long without the inner musical conviction to draw strength from, and the Sabaot know the best means to tap social mechanisms influential in the reception of variation and innovation.

Experience has now taught them that any attempt to change the patterns of music development will need to be widespread across the mountain, yet not rushed to the extent of creating a barrier to further motivation.¹⁷ Participants in the Saboti song workshop used a topical illustration:

"Now we must disturb the beehives elsewhere, not just in Saboti, as these thoughts are for *all* Sabaot".

Likewise, they recognised that all must pull together:

"If all this is to be revived, it needs us to be unified".¹⁸

I have often felt that the impact of a few workshops can do little when people are surrounded by a growing number of churches and radios, each loudly proclaiming their own styles of music. The resulting songs of these workshops may have been enjoyed by all who have heard them, but despite such appreciation, there is insufficient impact or output to counteract the dominance of other forms of worship on the mountain. Other openings must be found to encourage a more balanced use of music.

The practicalities of response are first to convince people that using indigenous music in a new context is achievable by all. This has been done in workshops with numerous participants commenting afterwards how surprised they

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¹⁷ Comment by Rev. Daudi M. Chebitwey, Saboti workshop, November 1999.

¹⁸ William Teresi, Saboti workshop, November 1999.

were to find that song composition was something they could do. Schools are an even better place to develop this awareness, particularly if master *bukantiit* players could be invited to provide tuition to groups of young students.

There is also the need to promote the *bukantiit* within churches and try to shake off the 'sinful' drinking associations. The future role and contribution of this instrument are considerable, but unless church leaders rethink their opinions and younger people develop more interest in using it, the prognosis is bleak. The *bukantiit* is an integral part of relatively few traditional song categories¹⁹ and therefore cannot be accused of direct involvement with those practices discouraged by Christianity. Instead it is entirely linked with enjoyment, story-telling and entertaining. Whether drinking is also present on such occasions has nothing to do with the instrument itself or its appropriateness for church use.

Turino (1998:100) describes one response by a South African *mbira* player to match the changing musical expectations amongst his people. Although the example is culture-specific, it demonstrates the interplay that is available in a situation previously perceived as closed. Abandoning his traditional improvisatory style, the *mbira* player decided to present his songs as prescribed arrangements of instrumental and vocal parts as he felt this identified more closely with the western concept of a song being a finished product. The response was a notable swing amongst other musicians to using the *mbira*.

Another option lies in the *bukantiit* creating a niche for itself in both traditional and modern repertoire, perhaps learning a lesson from the Japanese traditional bamboo flute, the *shakuhachi*. This has explored various performing techniques and is now equally at home in both western and non-western musics (Seyama 1998).

The *bukantiit* has partially begun the process by successfully adding a revised tuning mechanism, with ease of operation being the *raison d'être* for this development. But if the instrument itself is to remain in common use amongst the Sabaot, it must find ways to co-exist with the increasingly popular guitar, particularly

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¹⁹ Primarily those of history, *Mānyirōōr* and entertainment.

as amongst the younger Sabaot, ownership of a guitar carries visionary links with progress, education, prestige and the wider musical world.

To give a fuller picture of how other African instruments are responding to such pressures, I briefly mention some further examples. In Zimbabwe, the *mbira zdavadzimu* (a lamellophone variant with 22-keys), has found a new niche within urban electric guitar bands and the international 'worldbeat' market. In 'Afro-rock music', the songs which have best caught people's imaginations and become hits have likewise used the traditional *mbira* and Shona vocal style. An early exponent was Thomas Mapfumo in the 1970s, who combined indigenous elements with sounds already familiar to world beat fans, but also added an electric pick-up to the soundboard of the *mbira* in order to incorporate this quiet instrument into bands.

The same innovation is now happening in West Africa, such as in the music of Salif Keita, a direct descendant of the founder of the 13th century Mali Empire. His use of instruments illustrates his search for a blended sound, combining guitars, organs and saxophones with the *kora*, *balafon* and *djembe*. In Kenya itself, Musaimo (born c.1959) is one of an increasing number of musicians who deliberately target a wider age range, exploring ways to fuse new hip-hop beats and digital music with traditional sounds.²⁰

If present community patterns continue amongst the Sabaot, it is likely that initiatives to encourage composition and performance will best be developed through social events. Open-air meetings and churches with no windows are already important opportunities for such dissemination, but so too could be the establishing of a Sabaot 'Cultural Day' and/or music competitions. Competitiveness is seen as a good thing in Sabaot society, as is event-orientation and learning by observation and imitation of others. There could be classes for traditional-style secular *bukantiit* songs, newly composed traditional-style Christian songs, special use of a set text, separate men and women's song categories, recitations in the Sabaot language, drama and storytelling. Mang'esoy suggests that the best way to remotivate his people's pride in their cultural expression is to remind them of everything in their past that sets them apart from other groups in Kenya, perhaps by means of historical song narratives. There could

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²⁰ Ref. "Versatility is his secret weapon" by Wayua Muli, *Daily Nation*, 11 September 1999.



also be sections for more recent genres of song, helping people to become more aware of how different styles can complement each other in a balanced society.

Another opportunity that could be better harnessed is the education curricula at both local and national level. Despite the syllabus of KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) now covering a broad spectrum from diatonic scale testing to Kenyan traditional music knowledge, by far the greater impact comes from local teachers showing interest in indigenous music. The excuse that is given for avoiding this is that teachers are often posted to areas of which they have little cultural knowledge. However, it is their openness towards fostering cultural musical expression that is needed, or attitude rather than exactitude. The alternative, seen in so many Kenyan schools today, is cultural passivity.

In time, the muted calls of the Kenyan media industry for cultural songs and art forms could be used to advantage, as could extended marketing of traditional style songs through local radio. Several stations in Kenya have been granted vernacular language licences, including Rehema Radio in Eldoret which broadcasts Christian programmes in the Kalenjin language but has not used Sabaot music. There are also willing 'outsider' music/language-activists who are promoting various aspects of Kenya in films and are sometimes open to including indigenous music as a vital component in telling the story. There should be no qualms concerning the use of modern technology to reinforce traditional values as such a partnership may actually increase interest amongst younger listeners.

A further means of raising the profile of Sabaot music is to incorporate it into a cultural centre where songs and instruments are both displayed and performed. Musicians could be encouraged to meet regularly in various locations across the mountain to discuss new song applications, particularly in areas where they are sensing reluctance or church opposition towards embracing the concept. Musicians could also form small performing groups, either specialising in a particular typology or developing their skills in a wider range of songs. The participants in one workshop added that an interdenominational vocal group specialising in Sabaot indigenous worship songs would have considerable impact if it were invited to different churches across the mountain.



A recent development on Mount Elgon has been the formation of the 'Fellowship of Churches', whose main objective is to create a forum for unity across denominational lines using the Sabaot language. So far two hundred and forty church leaders from thirty-seven denominations have agreed to take part, but as yet they have no vision for using indigenous worship styles in combination with the vernacular.²¹ The opportunity begs to be developed, particularly as many elders have said in interviews that if there were more similarities between worship styles in churches and traditional music, they would find participating in churches less intimidating.²²

A second potential initiative is an association called the 'Mount Elgon Christian Music Association' (MECMA) which hopes to motivate upcoming musicians and give financial support to those who are already involved in music composition and wishing to make commercial recordings.

Even though the domains of church and secular music may have different goals, they inevitably impact the entire community. The difficulty with so many diverse ideas is that someone has to co-ordinate their implementation across the different domains. Many have said in workshops that they would be willing to help out, but with considerable priority shifts required in life-style and little financial incentive, invariably the attitude begins to lean towards complacency again. One Sabaot community leader suggested that "we should be like termites, working amongst the people to plant ideas in a voluntary way",²³ but the reality is that significant time and effort are required for a cause that not everyone is equally committed to.

### **9.3 Personal epilogue**

If the workshops have been anything to go by, a significant number of Sabaot on Mount Elgon are interested in a resurgence of traditional song values. The first to respond in this manner have been the older members of society, and surprisingly, they have been prepared to demonstrate flexibility concerning musical structures and contexts so long as some consistency is retained with the core values of Sabaot

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²¹ Figures supplied by Mang'esoy, June 2001.

²² Supported by Musumba's research, 1993:ii.

²³ Comment made during closing speeches of Saboti workshop, November 1999.

heritage. The workshops have also shown that many younger Sabaot have similar sentiments when they realise that traditional styles have the potential to be used in new ways.

Whether this will be sufficient to stimulate significant practical response concerning both the process and the outcome remains to be seen, but nevertheless, there have been some encouraging developments amongst the Sabaot. In 1996 Kisinja registered the *Cheptonon Bukantiit Group* of Kapkateny under the 'Self Help Project' of the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. This has represented the Sabaot in traditional song at several national events. In a similar vein, a group of elders led by Andrea Ndiwa have formed a 'Warriors Club' to remind people of their history through song, although care is taken not to stir aggressive raiding sentiments. After the turmoil of creating the Mount Elgon District in 1992, further change needs to avoid causing divisions.²⁴

On the church front, many are now more open to exploring a heritage of which they previously had reservations. For example, in Cheptais a group of pastors now feel there is no problem for a circumcision melody to be combined with Scripture as the message takes precedence over any musical associations. Their sentiments are similar to those of Reverend Rowland Hill (1744-1833) who used drinking ballads as the basis for hymns and "saw no reason why the devil should have all the best tunes".²⁵ There are also a few committed individual musicians such as Chuma and Mang'esoy who are determined to develop traditional styles of worship. Both are skilled performers on the *bukantiit* and have already recorded many of their own worship songs for distribution on the mountain.

It is encouraging to see several Sabaot scholars now undertaking their own cultural research, and it is to be hoped that this implements Nketia's call (1991:86) for a more penetrating "culture critique". But in terms of music, cultural identification has to be lived rather than written, particularly in a people-group that still has overtones of its oral-based background. They relate more to the experiential than the hypothetical, and this must be reflected in all approaches relating to music use. It is

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²⁴ Comment made by Patrick Ng'eywo, 11 February 1999.

²⁵ Quote taken from *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (3rd ed.), 1979, England: Oxford University Press: 254. Not included in bibliography.

It is encouraging to see several Sabaot scholars now undertaking their own cultural research, and it is to be hoped that this implements Nketia's call (1991:86) for a more penetrating "culture critique". But in terms of music, cultural identification has to be lived rather than written, particularly in a people-group that still has overtones of its oral-based background. They relate more to the experiential than the hypothetical, and this must be reflected in all approaches relating to music use. It is my hope that any footsteps I have left on the mountain will be rapidly replaced by Sabaot musicians who will be influential in helping the cultural identity of their people continue to unfold. It is also hoped that they will have the support and encouragement of local authority figures amongst the Sabaot community who are open to a balanced use of music. The sentiment that a task cannot be achieved without a unified approach and help from others is expressed in a Sabaot proverb:

*-Mēērēru keey :chii mēt.*

One cannot shave one's head.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted cultural attitudes both amongst the Sabaot and in Kenya itself, with the broader principles being significant for all those traditional music systems in East Africa which face similar change factors. It has implications for developmental organisations, churches, and for those involved in language work, community development and education. It demonstrates a practical and culturally supportive application of ethnomusicology, particularly in the African move towards 'modernisation', and challenges the belief that role-specificity of traditional music blocks its integration into other contexts. It shows that tradition can be seen in a new light, that it can continue to bear fruit for future generations, and that it does not have to give way to alternative styles of musical expression. However, it cannot be assumed that inherent features of Sabaot traditional music will not change, or that song structures and meanings will remain relevant to subsequent generations.

This research has also shown the influence of *bukantiit* tuning on theoretical tonal centres, and has hopefully extended thinking on the links between processes of language and music shift. The reports of current trends in music use on Mount Elgon

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²⁵ Quote taken from *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (3rd ed.), 1979, England: Oxford University Press: 254. Not included in bibliography.

have made clearer the implications should rapid divergence in music continue amongst the Sabaot, and a number of areas needing further research are listed. If nothing else, I hope my interest in the Sabaot will give their musical ecosystem "a shot in the arm"²⁶ by being of value and encouragement to the local musicians on Mount Elgon. In the words of a Sabaot pastor, "thoughts like these should be flies in our ears to remind us of the way we are going",²⁷ and I count myself as one who needs to be reminded.

I also sincerely hope that none of the opinions expressed herein will be seen as applying pressure for change. Neither do I wish to express a preference for any particular style to be used for worship purposes. I do believe, however, that unless some activity can be devised to match the extent of media and national church influence, Sabaot churches will remain focused on styles that originate from outside sources. Clearly there can be no complacency as to the continuation of Sabaot indigenous song styles unless the value system and mindset of their living culture is addressed. Hence, having made these observations and suggestions, I now leave the outcome where it should be, with the Sabaot.

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²⁶ Cooke, 1999:18.

²⁷ Christopher Kiplang'at.

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## APPENDIX I:

### People who assisted in interviews and performances

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Any biographical details are included with the permission of those concerned, and are only meant to be the briefest of sketches for my own interview purposes.

#### Categories

- A. Singers and instrumentalists specialising in traditional Sabaot music, aged fifty and over
- B. Younger singers and performers of traditional Sabaot music
- C. Teachers
- D. Performers specialising in non-traditional church music
- E. Instrument makers
- F. Those consulted for socio-anthropological and political history
- G. Clergy, mission, or Sabaot BTL translation team
- H. Government officials
- I. Consultant linguists in Sabaot language
- J. Consultant literacy specialists in Sabaot area
- K. Others who have attended song workshops

#### A. Singers and instrumentalists specialising in traditional Sabaot music, aged fifty and over

MALE:

**Alfred Mzee Kener** (recorded 22/8/97).

Singer.

**Andrea Ndiwa** (interviewed 28/9/98, recorded and interviewed 12/12/98).

Singer, farmer. Born 1932 in Toywondet, completed schooling to Standard 4, and has lived on the mountain all his life, currently near Makutano. Andrea has several wives, can speak and write Swahili, and has no church background. He is Chairman of Warrior Club Singers, a group that endeavours to preserve the historical culture of the Sabaot through song.

**Benjamin Chemosit Kisinja** (recorded in 1994, interviewed 22/9/98, 25/9/98, recorded 26/9/98).

Chemosit means 'the one born after twins'. Kisinja was born in 1946 in the Chelagoy area of Cheptonon sublocation, where he has lived most of his life. His father came from the Cheptais area. Kisinja speaks the *Book* dialect. From 1956 he attended primary school on the mountain to Standard 4 level, but left in 1958 when his father fell sick. He was circumcised in 1970 at the age of 24, and began playing the *bukantiit* a year later (a story which is recounted in chapter four). He is married to Mary, a relative of Chemengu. Kisinja specialises in the traditional manner of playing, but alternates this with the strumming style. He has performed for President Kenyatta, Henry Kissinger (hence the nickname 'Kisinja'), and various other Heads of State. In 1996 he and four other musicians formed the *Cheptonon Bukantiit Group* of



Kapkateny, and registered it under the 'Self Help Project' of the Ministry of Culture and Social Services.

**Charlis Naibei Kinyokye (Stephen)**, (interviewed and recorded 1994, 22/7/97, 24/9/98, 13/7/99).

Also nicknamed Stuka (Swahili for 'startled'). Born 1951, Kinyokye speaks the *Mosoob* dialect, and says he is "pure *Mosoob*". There were few schools when he was a child, and the nearest was too far away for him to attend. He now lives opposite Kipsikirok Primary School close to the bamboo forest edge. He is a skilled composer, singer and *bukantiit* player, rich in musical traditions. Owing to being left-handed, the order of strings on his instrument is reversed, and he is known as "the one who plays from the left side". Charlis considers his occupation to be both traditional musician and farmer. His wife is called Julie.

**Isaac Kiboi Mutios** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kapsokwony, learnt *bukantiit* from his father. No schooling, uses *Book* dialect, Catholic.

**Joktan Naibei Tono** (recorded with Ndiwa and Kirui 12/12/98).

Singer, but also plays *bukantiit*.

**Joseph Kimountai Kirui** (recorded with Ndiwa 12/12/98).

Singer and *bukantiit* player. Lives in Cheptoror B near Kobsiir.

**Kororio arap Chesabir** (recorded 22/7/97, interviewed 30/9/98, 14/7/99).

Singer, composer of many songs and used to play the *bukantiit* (taught by friends). Born around 1900 in a cave called Kibtambul, Kororio is a *tēkēryoontēēt* child and the last of his age-set alive today. He is reputed to be the oldest person on the mountain, speaks *Mosoob* with a little Swahili, but did not attend school. In his youth he used to look after beehives and animals. His three wives have died, leaving eight children, all of whom have had some primary schooling. He now lives in Kibumet village near Sinopchebokos with his grandchildren. Kororio is one of the last to remember the *ng'ētunyo* songs.

**Masai Kokeny Meseng'** (interviewed and recorded 24/9/98, interviewed 28/9/98).

Experienced traditional singer, does not play the *bukantiit*. Born in 1937 in Turbo village, now lives in Chebyuk. Masai speaks the *Mosoob* dialect and Swahili. He attended primary school up to Standard 2, and is now a farmer. Wife deceased.

**Mattayo Mutios** (recorded during Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Koikoi, skilled on *bukantiit*.

**Musa (Moses) Chemasuet** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Kaptolo (Bukusu), now comes from Kibuk. Catholic, speaks *Book* dialect, plays and makes *bukantiinek*. Brother of Thomas Mutios Ndiwa.

**Mwene Simoto** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Koikoi, skilled on *bukantiit*.

**Nelson Chebrio Ng'eywo** (recorded 9/2/99).

Plays *kiiraanchiinek* and *bukantiit*.

**Patrick Ndege Ndiwa** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, born 1943, from Kibuk. Speaks *Koony* dialect, and used to play *bukantiit* when young. Catholic, but feels uncomfortable with singing Swahili



translations. Ndiwa is Chairman of the Sabaot BTL Grassroots Committee in Kapsokwony.

**Pkania Mutios** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Koikoi, skilled on *bukantiit*.

**Stephen Sikiriet** (recorded one song 22/8/97 in which he accompanied Kororio).  
Singer.

**Thomas Mutios Ndiwa** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Plays traditional style *bukantiit* as learnt from his father. Born in Kaptolo (Bukusu area). Now comes from Kibuk. Catholic, village leader, speaks *Book* dialect. Brother of Musa Chemasuet.

**Wilfred Kibsamii Kabkosom** (recorded 26/9/98).

Singer, often pairs with Kisinja.

**William Chelasia** (interviewed and recorded 24/9/98 in Chepyuk).

Farmer and traditional musician. Born in 1938, speaks *Mosoob* dialect. No schooling, has lived on the mountain all his life in the Kibumet area (near Chepyuk). Singer, but also plays *bukantiit*. Pentecostal.

#### *FEMALE:*

**Ayaasi Maasai** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, born in 1931, from Nomoryoo near Kibuk, sister of Patrick Ndege Ndiwa. Learnt traditional songs at home, speaks *Koony* dialect.

**Chemunui** (Recorded 22/7/97, 10/2/99, interviewed 12/99).

Singer, age uncertain but was about ten years old when the first white man came to the mountain, so estimated birth around 1915. Lives in area called Tomoi near Cheptoror A.

**Kookoob Teeng'an** (Record July 1999).

Singer, no details known except she is related to Kororio. He was circumcised with her father so she calls them both 'father'.

**Maria Maiba Masai** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Singer, born 1918 in Chematiich area near Cheptais.

#### *B. Younger singers and performers of traditional Sabaot music*

#### *MALE:*

**Bernard Chuma Mulunda** (workshop 4/97, interviewed 29/9/98).

Born in 1966, his parents are from Chebushen village. He is now a farmer, living in Kibumet near the home of Kororio arap Chesabir. Attends the Church of Christ, where he leads the music occasionally and preaches. Speaks *Mosoob* dialect, Swahili and English. All schooling was on the mountain, with secondary school in Cheptais. His brother taught him to play the *bukantiit*. He has recorded several audio cassettes of his own recent traditional style Sabaot Christian songs for BTL (CM 128, CM 132).

**Bernard Kipsamii** (attended Kobsiuro workshop 4/97, recorded 22/4/97).

No information except he is a singer and plays *bukantiit* using both plucking and strumming styles.

**Hilary J.C. Tirob** (interviewed and recorded 9/2/99).

Born in 1973 in Labot (village in moorland area). Before 1973, his family lived first in Arawa (moorland area above forest on eastern side of Mount Elgon) and then moved to Labot in search of better pastures. Immediately after the birth of Hilary, his family completed another move back to Trans Nzoia (part of government resettlement). Hilary attended primary school in Chebyuk, and now lives with his wife and three children in Kiborowo near Kaboiyo. He farms mixed vegetables, but has not been allocated land. He taught himself the *bukantiit*, but only plays this within his own home, inviting elders for 'song' evenings. He also composes but prefers to set new words to existing melodies. Hilary says he is not good at *chōōlyēēt*, *sēēryēēt* or twins traditional songs, but prefers history and lullaby songs. He has a highly ornamented *bukantiit* modelled after his grandfather's instrument, but with a wood resonator face. He learnt *solfa* notation at school and can also read the new Sabaot orthography. He used to be in the Catholic Church, but left when they discouraged use of the *bukantiit* in worship. He does not compose Christian songs because he says he does not know enough.

**Jackson Kibsebe Masai** (recorded 26/9/98, 9/2/99).

Singer, born 1973, speaks *Koony* dialect. Farmer, knows many work songs.

**Patrick Boiyo Mang'esoy** (several workshops, interviewed and consulted numerous times).

Born in 1954 in Arawa village (near Koitokoch in moorland above forest), speaks *Koony* dialect. His family moved to Kiptukot forest station on the eastern slopes of Mount Elgon around 1956, where his father was a forest guard and taught Patrick the *bukantiit*. His father was also monogamous, and Patrick was the only son with six sisters. He attended primary school in Kiptukot, began secondary in Kapkateny (finishing by correspondence) and went on to complete a BA in Bible and Translation Studies at PACC (Nairobi), graduating in 1997. He has land in Torokwo village (Kibura sublocation near Kobsiuro division), but now lives in Nairobi with his family, working as a Translation Consultant (Intern) with BTL. His article entitled "The Challenges of Hebrew Culture and Discourse in Translating Proverbs into Sabaot" is soon to be published by SIL. A highly skilled *bukantiit* player, Patrick could already play this before attending school, and he competed at national level music competitions. The majority of songs he learnt at school were in Swahili or English, the ones he learnt at home were in Sabaot. Patrick and his family have recorded many cassettes of Scripture songs sung in the traditional Sabaot style.

**Peter Torus** (recorded 9/2/99).

Born in 1976 in Cheptaburur near Kipsigon, where he still lives. Attended local primary school. Specialises on *kiiraanchiinek*, and is a farmer by trade.

**Silas Kiprop** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99, recorded 2/99).

Speaks *Sōmēēk* dialect, lives in Chewangoy, plays *bukantiit* using mostly strumming style.

## *FEMALE:*

### **Judith Chemayek** (interviewed and recorded 14/12/98).

Born in 1959 in an area called Chepushen (upper west of mountain), and circumcised at the age of 16. Did not attend school as there were none nearby. Judith has never left the mountain, and knows little Swahili. She is married with two children, and lives on the central ridge between Kobsiuro and Chewangoy. Used to attend the Full Gospel church, but left recently due to many family problems at home (such as lack of food). She knows all the Swahili songs currently sung in the church, but is also one of the few women remaining who can sing the solo part of *mēliilto* songs, and is reputed to be the best woman singer in the Kobsiuro area. She has never tried to play the *bukantiit*.

## C. Teachers

### **Isaac Kipsekei Kamoenyi** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kobsiuro, speaks *Sōmēēk* dialect. Primary school teacher, former Sabaot BTL Grassroots Committee Chairman. Preacher, Church elder and lay reader at ACK. Owns a restaurant in Saboti.

### **Patrick Chumo** (interviewed 20/8/97).

Young primary school teacher now based in Eldoret. His family live in Kimurio village.

### **Sichei Soet Musa (Moses)** (interviewed 10/12/98, Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Music teacher at Kapsokwony High School, lowland Sabaot, keen promoter of traditional Sabaot music in the school.

### **Wycliffe Kanai** (interviewed 24/9/98).

Mother tongue teacher trainer for BTL literacy project, lives in Chewangoy.

## D. Performers specialising in non-traditional church music

### **Joseph Kwemai Morongo** (interviewed 25/9/98, workshop 4/97, recorded in 1999).

Born 1974 in Busoga, Uganda, then moved with his parents to Mount Elgon in 1982. Speaks *Book* dialect. Joseph plays the *bukantiit* (uses mostly strumming style to accompany 'church style' songs), but now prefers to play guitar in a duo with Silas Kiprop on *bukantiit*. He lives in Chewangoy where he is the youth leader of the PAG church, is married to Esther, and has three sons.

## E. Instrument makers

### **Arap Mulunda** (modified my *bukantiit* 11/99).

Instrument maker, lives near Cheptoror.

### **Stanley Tung'wet** (interviewed 9/98).

Makes *bukantiinek*. Lives in Chewangoy, but is a primary school teacher in Kabukwa. He made his first instrument in 1992, and prefers using plywood over a wood frame with steel strings.

**William Beo Chemengu** (interviewed 15/12/98).

Born in 1932 in Kasawai (now Trans Nzoia, then called Shamba), and now lives in Kapkerwa, a village situated high on a ridge on the edges of the forest beyond Chepyuk. His father was born in Chebwek near Cheptais. Chemengu speaks the *Book* dialect, and can understand Swahili. He has travelled to Uganda (*Sebei* area). He had no schooling (none available), but his five sons and two daughters have all attended primary school although there was no money to send them further. He learnt carpentry from his elder brother and now makes furniture and timber beams for houses. He is also famous for making *bukantiinek*, including Kisinja's instrument in 1972, and guitars. The latter take him about four days to complete and most of his orders come from people living in the lower parts of the mountain. He used to play *bukantiit* until he accidentally cut the tendons of his right hand.

F. Those consulted for socio-anthropological and political history

**Alfred Chemaget** (interviewed 11/2/99).

Born in 1924 in Cheptais and has lived there ever since. Completed primary schooling up to Standard 4. He is now the treasurer of the Sabaot BTL Grassroots Language Committee. A farmer and member of the SDA Church. Plays *kiiraanchiinek*.

**Godfrey Cheproot Kipsisey (Sobet)** (interviewed 19/11/97, 17/4/98, 14/12/99).

Born in Kapsokwony area in 1968, attended Kapsokwony Primary School until 1982, followed by Chesamis High School. He graduated from Nairobi University in 1993 with a BA in anthropology. Married in 1998, and is a member of Kapsokwony SDA Church. He works for BTL and is currently writing a book on Sabaot culture and planning to undertake a Masters in anthropology. Kipsisey has published in Notes on Anthropology (SIL), and is the author of *Sabaot Material Culture: Past and Present*; *Sabaot-Kiswahili-English Dictionary*; and the *Sabaot Ethnobiological Dictionary*. He recently set in place a community project to create a Sabaot Museum Centre at the Kapsokwony District Headquarters.

**Joseph Chesebe** (interviewed 11/2/99).

Born in 1926 in Seregani (in Cheptais Division), primary schooling up to Standard 3. Village elder and farmer, also a member of Toroso Salvation Army. Plays no instrument, but likes to dance.

**Mark Ndiema** (interviewed 29/9/97, I attended his wedding 13/2/99).

No information, not related to Stanley Ndiema.

**Patrick Ng'eywo** (interviewed 11/2/99).

Born in 1973 in Cheptais, but now lives in Kobsiuro, Soyēēt area, Emia location. Speaks some English, and is training in art production with Sabaot BTL project. Evangelist for Maranatha Church.

**Simon Makan Mayiek** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

From Kibuk. Has been a member of the Sabaot BTL Divisional Committee since 1993. Simon speaks the *Book* dialect, attends Church of Christ, and has spent two years living in Nairobi. Skilled interpreter and teacher.



**Stanley Ndiema** (interviewed 21/8/97, then my assistant from 9/98 to 12/99).

Born 1963 in Kapsorei above Laboot in the moorland. In the late sixties his family moved to Toobo on the upper edge of the forest to escape Bagisu cattle raids from the Uganda side. In 1971 the Government allocated land in Chepyuk to his family, to which Stanley's elder brother moved in 1974 and the rest of the family reluctantly followed in 1979 after government pressure. They took all their cows, but many died due to change in climate and limited grazing. Stanley speaks *Mosoob* dialect, and attended primary school on the mountain. He moved to Webuye for secondary schooling, then completed two years in Uganda (Kapchorwa) in teacher training. He taught for one term at Sosabel Primary School in 1992, and is currently teaching in Eldoret. His home is near Cheptoror A, and he has attended the Full Gospel Church of Kenya. His father is non-Christian, has three wives and eighteen children.

**Winston M.F. Tung'wet** (interviewed 9/2/99).

Born in 1971 in Turbo, then moved to Kiborowo, then Kabukwa, and finally to Cheptoror A. Primary schooling in Kipsikirok and Chepyuk, secondary to Form 4 at Kapsokwony, speaks English. Learnt Swahili songs at CPK church, but also likes traditional styles.

#### G. Clergy, mission, or Sabaot BTL translation team

**Christopher Kiplang'at** (interviewed 30/9/97, 19/9/98).

Born in 1956. All schooling on the mountain, then pastoral training in Maseno (1 year). Speaks *Koony* dialect, and his family has moved location many times on the mountain. Presently Sabaot BTL Scripture Use Officer, also a Pastor of ACK (Anglican Church of Kenya). Founder of ChrisAgape Pioneers Ministry. Currently completing a BA in theological studies.

**Daudi M. Chebitwey ('Babu'), Rev.** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Cheptais. Speaks mixed dialect, originally *Book*. Pastor at ACK Church. Chairman of Sabaot BTL Kitalale Grassroots Committee. Calls himself a 'music prophet' as he often receives new songs in his dreams.

**Fielden and Janet Allison** (interviewed 2/99).

American missionaries for Church of Christ, living at Makutano.

**Kiboki Kigai** (interviewed 18/9/98, 23/9/98).

Born in 1955. Attended primary and secondary school on Mount Elgon, completed BA in Kitale in 1999. Speaks *Koony* dialect, and lives in Kebee near Kipsigon. Combines being the Pastor of Kenya Church of Christ in Kawangoy with being a translator for Sabaot BTL, of which he is also a former project leader.

**Linus Kipsisei** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Kibuk, attends SDA Church. Assistant Scripture Use Promoter for Sabaot BTL.

**Moses Masai Kipkut (Moss)** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Former Assistant Scripture Use Promoter for Sabaot BTL.

H. Government officials (plus position at time of interview)

**Christopher Munguti** (visited 21/9/98).

DC for Mount Elgon District, based at Kapsokwony, now transferred.

**Kibiti Rintari**. (visited 16/12/98).

DC for Trans Nzoia District, based at Kitale, now transferred.

**Kwemoi Tenderesi** (met 21/9/98).

Chief of Emia Division.

**Okello** (met 21/9/98).

DO for Kobsiir Division, based at Nyankundi. Luo but speaks English.

**Stephen Chepkurui** (met Sept 98).

Councillor for Cheptonon Sub-location.

I. Consultant linguists in Sabaot language

**Iver Larsen** (history and linguistic advice).

From Denmark. Lived in Chewangoy for many years, and spearheaded the BTL translation project amongst the Sabaot. Author of considerable linguistic research (see Bibliography), and is a consultant linguist for SIL International.

**Jim Leonard** (linguistic advice).

American, resident in Kobsiir for many years, directing the Sabaot BTL translation programme. Author of many articles on Sabaot language and culture (see Bibliography).

**Patrick Mang'esoy** (see under *Younger singers and performers of traditional Sabaot music*).

J. Consultant literacy specialists in Sabaot area

**Agatha van Ginkel** (culture advice).

Resident in Kobsiir, directing mother tongue literacy work for Sabaot BTL since 1995.

K. Others who have attended song workshops

MALE:

**Ali Mehuti Sipayo** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Romromwet (forest) in 1972, moved lower in 1989. Catholic Church youth leader, speaks *Koony* dialect. Some exposure to traditional songs, but more familiar with recent church chorus style.

**Ambrose Cheres** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Namorio, *Book* dialect. Secondary school teacher, choir trainer and church elder in Reformed Church of East Africa. Has entered his students in National Music Festivals.

**Andrew Tendet** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, composer. No other information.

**Benjamin Mwang'a** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Koikoi, speaks mixed dialect, choir leader for AIC.



**Cheng'ori Lenard** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Kibuk, Evangelist for Maranatha Church of Kapsokwony, plays guitar, speaks *Koony* dialect.

**Davis Kiboi** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Comes from Chesito, speaks *Koony* dialect, and is an active PCK Church choirmaster.

**Felix Juma Simotwa** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kapenguria (Pokot), speaks *Koony* dialect, singer, plays no instruments, evangelist for PCMA Church.

**Geoffrey Kipsiseib** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Cheptonon. Maranatha Church, Sunday school teacher, *Book* dialect, sings and plays guitar.

**George Abel** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Kenya Teso, but born in Kapsokwony. Choir and youth leader in Christ Deliverance Church. Speaks mixed dialect.

**Juma Reuben Kisa** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, composer. No other information.

**Martin Kitio Masai** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

From Teldet near Saboti, *Koony* dialect. Self taught musician.

**Matthew Kiboi Festo** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kaptama. Mother speaks *Book* dialect, but Kaptama people use *Koony*. Music teacher, and has previously attended a one-week university music seminar off the mountain. Active in the SDA Church.

**Moses Maket** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Bungoma, now lives in Koikoi. Deacon at KAG Church, where he learnt the guitar. Uses *Book* dialect.

**Moss Masai** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kongit, now from Kitalale. Pastor, teacher and choir member of Kaptama SDA Church, speaks *Book* dialect.

**Mourice Kinyanja** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Kibuk, *Book* dialect, Catholic Church member in Kibuk.

**Oliver Juma Muchas** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kaptama, lives in Saboti Division. Deacon and choirmaster at SDA Church. Speaks *Book* dialect, self taught on guitar.

**Peter Kwemai Morongo** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Cheptais, now living in Kapsokwony. Pastor of Church of Christ, sings and plays guitar.

**Silas Ng'eywo** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, no other information.

**Simon Makan Masudi** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kapkateny near Kobsiir. *Book* dialect, singer, doesn't play *bukantiit*. Member of Catholic Church, and Chairman of Sabaot BTL Grassroots Committee (Saboti).

**Simon Masirat** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Webuye, moved to Saboti. Choirmaster in SDA Church, learnt music from his brother.

**Stephen Juma Mosobin (Francis B.)** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Young but experienced worship leader at Missionary Fellowship in Kaptama. Skilled guitarist.

**Steven Kiboret Ng'eywo** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Singer, born in 1970, lives in Kapsokwony, speaks *Book* dialect. Evangelist for First Church of Christ.

**William Teresi ('Mzee Alleluya')** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Cheptais, now a retired schoolmaster. Taught at Saboti Primary School in 1954. Evangelist and church elder for Kenya Good News Church. Speaks *Book* dialect.

**Wycliffe Kipchana Purko** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Cheptais. Evangelist and sings in choir of Church of Christ in Kapsokwony. Speaks *Book* dialect, no music training.

#### *FEMALE:*

**Jane Chemeli** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Choir member and occasional director at SDA Church.

**Lilian Chemayiek** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Kapenguria (Pokot area) but is a Sabaot and uses the *Book* dialect. Choir member at ACK Church.

**Lydia Cherop** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Saboti, *Book* dialect, choir member at ACK.

**Mildred Chebosis** (Kapsokwony workshop 8/99).

Born in Kibuk 1977, schooling until Standard 7, sings in Christ Church choir, speaks *Koony* dialect.

**Roselyne Chesamiy** (Saboti workshop 11/99).

Born in Koikoi, family lives in Webuye. Speaks *Book* dialect, member of SDA Church choir and youth leader, also the Saboti Scripture Use Assistant for Sabaot BTL.

## APPENDIX II: Song transcriptions

- (i) Although these transcriptions represent a broad anthology of Sabaot songs, only a small selection of examples can be included. Many others exist in manuscript format and may be printed at a later date.
- (ii) Although some musicologists feel comparative reference is clearer if all examples are notated using a similar range of pitches (key), I have used the pitch from the time of recording lest evidence is disturbed for any future investigations.
- (iii) In the layout, I have attempted to show the cyclical nature of many of these songs, although this has not always been possible owing to page size.

Song title	CD no.	Page no.	Tape catalogue number
<b>TRADITIONAL</b>			
Night before circumcision. <i>Ōkuur chēēmoomo.</i>	3	331	44A:82-102
Post-circumcision. <i>Chōōlyēēt, Āryo kwēyo.</i>	4	333	42A:1-120
Post-circumcision, leopard rite. <i>Mēliilto.</i>	6	336	41B:324-345
Post-circumcision, leopard rite. <i>Mēliilto, ntēekwēyiit</i>	7	338	44A:7-38
Post-circumcision, lion rite. <i>Ng'ētunyo.</i>	8	340	44A:39-52
Marriage song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab kēēsyēet, sōōsyoo kimiirēy.</i>	9	341	41A:162-197
Marriage song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab kēēsyēet, buukwo.</i>	11	344	41A:231-264
Twins birth purification, pit song. <i>Tyēentaab saramēek.</i>	12	347	38A:116-129
Birth of twins, mother's confinement. <i>Tyēentaab saramēek, tuutu yaa.</i>	14	349	44B:59-100
Birth of twins, mother's confinement. <i>Tyēentaab saramēek, ōmēēryēē.</i>	15	354	44B:151-175
Warriors preparing for a raid. <i>Tyēenwookikaab seeteet.</i>	17	356	47A:63-89
Warrior narrative song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt, Mānyirōōr</i> (Kisinja).	18	358	40A:2-245
Ploughing song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab yiisyēēt, teetaab kurēēt.</i>	21	367	43A:1-54
Lullaby. <i>Tyēento nyēē /kēēsooysooyēē keekwēēt, ōōrēērōō.</i>	22	370	41B:278-299
Children's song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab lēēkōōk, āme Musuunkuuk ntooteekwaa.</i>	24	372	41B:268-271

Children's song about elopement. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkook, chōōrēy.</i>	25	373	41B:271-278
Clan praise song. <i>Aroosyek,</i> <i>/kikeekwey kōōntōōwoo</i> (chosen leader).	27	374	40A:294-340
MANG'ESOY			
Christian song. <i>Makerkeey :teng'eeek</i> (Parable of the Sower)	34	382	CM 123A:169-220
CHURCH			
Sabaot church song. <i>Rubiichooto</i> (Those Disciples), Church of Christ #45.	32	393	39B:163-207
Hymn (I've Wandered Far Away From God).	--	395	--
WORKSHOP			
Group workshop song, based on Lk. 4:41	37	396	30A:35-54
Group workshop song, based on Jn. 3:16	38	399	44A:312-337
Group workshop song, based on Jn. 3:16	--	402	44A:341-389
Group workshop song, based on Mt. 5:3-4	39	406	47A:122-134
Workshop song, based on Jn. 14:15-17	40	408	48B:122-196

CD No.3 The night before circumcision. *Ōkuur chēēmoomo.*  
 (tape ref. 44A:82-102. The first phrase up to <|> is  
 not included in the CD excerpt)

(3 cycles of 16 beats each)

TC = G

♩ = 94

Voices

Bukantiit

Solo A(a)

Response (b)

Ō - kuur chēē - moo - mo ēē, ō - kuur chēē - moo - mo ēē,  
 Call for the circumcision candidate's mother to come and bless her children...

B(c)

Solo (d)

Response B(c)

Solo (d)

Response C

Solo D

ōy ēē ōō wōōy-ēē ōō wōōy-ēē ōō wōōy-ēē ōō wōōy-ēē ōō ēē-ōō, ku-tu  
 (vocables)

Response E

Solo B

wēn tō - mō - tēēt, ēē, ku-tu - wēn tō - mō tēēt, ēē wōōy-ēē ōō wōōy-ēē ōō  
 to give a gift of tobacco, yes, (vocables)

Response B

Solo C

Response

wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōy ēē

Solo D

Response E

Solo B

Solo

ōō. Ku-tu-wēn-bu ma-wuut, ēē, ku-tu-wēn-bu ma-wuut, ēē wōōy-ēē ōō wōōy-ēē  
 Call her to give gifts of welcome* (vocables)

* 'gifts of welcome' are traditionally tobacco, beer and food.

Response B Solo Response C Solo D

ōō wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōy ēē ōō, ku - tu - wēn sa -  
to reward the twins, yes, (vocables).

Response E B Solo

ra - meek, ēē, ku - tu - wēn sa - ra - meek, ēē, wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōō

Response B Solo Response C

wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōō wōōy - ēē ōy ōō ōō.



CD No.4 Post-circumcision song.

*Chōōlyēēt, āryo kwēyo.*

(tape ref. 42A:1-120, CD excerpt ends at )

NB: the expanded meaning of the response is that "when we sing, it is the thud of the shoes that gives the rhythm".

This recording enters during spoken song introduction and ululations:

"Bo saakweet nyoonki ānkooyēnchi tyēnto, ānkōōnoboochi sinēnto"

(This ceremony is for the Nyoonki age-set, let them reply to the song. Let them be at peace).

♩ = 88 TC = F

Solo woman

*ā-ng'ā-loo-lē kut ā-bot, dō.*  
I will not stop singing this until I die.

Response (2 part)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*  
Eh, the shoes are sneezing on the ground

*Nzēkwēyiinēk*

*wōy- ēē wōy- ēē*  
(vocables)

*Kēē-mii kay-taab mō - chō - kōr, ēē,*  
We are at the home of our grandson  
(or granddaughter)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē - yo, ēē.*

Female vocalist

*wēē - chi keey saang' ki - rock mō - chō - kōr ēē*  
now you, grandson, go out first (x 2)

*Ēē ār - yo kwē - yo Ēē*

*wēē - chi keey saang' ki rook mō - chō - kōr.*

*ār - yo kwē - yo, ēē.*

Solo girl

*Ō - koo - noo a - nii moo - mo, ēē,*  
Son of my mother,

*wō - yēn baa ku - bus moo, ēē. Iiy*  
just answer for my stomach

*Ēē ār - yo kwē - yo Ēē ār - yo kwē - yo, ēē.*

Male vocalist

nyēē - nyoo mwaay - ta. *Ā - ng'oo - loo - lēē tul -*  
to be comforted. I am speaking on an old mountain,

*Ēē* *ār - yo kwē - yo*

wo kēny, ēē, *kēē - ng'ā - loo - lēē suu - nku - tuut.*  
we are speaking in the wilderness.

*Ēē* *ār - yo kwē - yo,* *ēē.*

Second male vocalist

*A - raab Chaa-chi taa-kwee-nye* *a - raab Chaa-chi taa-kwee-nye.*  
Son of Chaachi, I greet you, son of Chaachi, I greet you.

*Ēē* *ār-yo kwē-yo* *Ēē* *ār-yo kwē-yo,* *ēē.*

*Ko-roo - tu-nēē Tēr-yēēt, ēē,* *ko-roo - tu-nēē Moo-ri-kiis ēē.*  
they are coming back from Tēryēēt, coming from Moorikiis (river).  
(mountain place)

*Ēē* *ār-yo kwē-yo* *Ēē* *ār-yo kwē-yo,* *ēē.*

(ululation)

*Ā - chā - mē ā - nii chēē - bu - toor,*  
I love the one who broke the path,  
(ie. the first-born)

*Ēē* *ār - yo kwē - yo* *Ēē*

*ā - chā - mē ā - nii chēē - bu - toor.*  
I love the one who broke the path.

*ār - yo kwē - yo,* *ēē.*

Woman's voice

*Ā-choo-nēē a-niiKi-buu-mēt, ā-mji-tē kaabā mo-ng'o.*  
I come from Kibuumēt, I am at the home of Among'o.

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

Male vocalist

*Ā-chā-mē a-niimō-chō-kōr, ā-chā-mē a-niichēē-but*  
I love the home of my grandson, I love the first-born.

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

(remainder of words largely inaudible due to circling movement of singers)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

Spoken above solo singer: *Nyoonki chaas baand* (This is Nyonki Jazz Band!)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

Spoken: *Nyoonki chaas baand* (This is Nyonki Jazz Band!)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

(Solo singers continue into the start of the second *Chōdlyēēt* song, but the background talking and constant movement of the singers means the the remaining section of this song is unclear in the recording and therefore not able to be accurately transcribed)

*Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo Ēē ār-yo kwē-yo, ēē.*

CD No.6 Post-circumcision, leopard rite.

*Mēliilto.*

(tape ref. 41B:324-345, CD excerpt ends at )

NB: Cheemay is used as an example of one whom the Sabaot woman should not follow. She is cunning, deceptive and excessive (cooks four portions of *ugali* when one would have been sufficient), whereas the desired norms for Sabaot women are to be meek, loving and accommodating.

♩ = 100

TC = C

Solo woman

Yyō wē lē - yyē ēē ōō - yyōō wē lēy ō -  
Oh yes, ee,

lēē yyōō wē baa - ba wēēy yyōō wē baa - ba ō -  
oh, yes baby,

lēē koor ko tu - kul :Chee - may wēēy ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē ō -  
Cheemay is the real wife, oh yes,

ēē ki - kwaany ki -mook a - ng'wan yyōō wē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē. ō -  
she cooked four ugali's, oh yes.

lēē wē lē - yyē ēē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē. ō -  
Oh yes, ee,

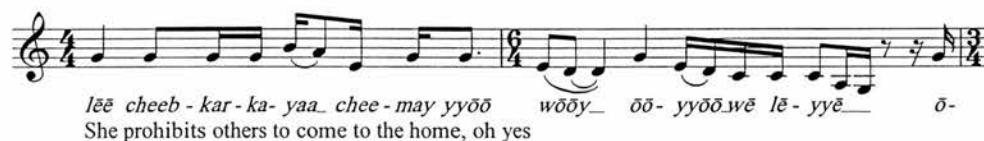
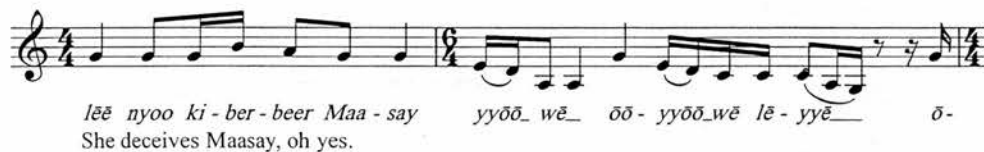
lēē wē lē - yyē ōō ēē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē. ō -

lēē ka - raa - ra - naa si - nēn yyōō wē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē ō -  
It is good to be gentle,

lēē ka - raa - ra naa si - nēn wēē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē. ōō -  
gentleness is good, oh yes.

yyē wē lē - yyē yyaa ōō - yyō wē lē - yyē ō -  
oh yes,

lēē chēē - rē - bir wē lē - yyē ēē ōō - yyōō wē lē - yyē ō -  
oh guard this, ee, yes, my young one, yes.



CD No.7 Post-circumcision, leopard rite.

*Mēliilto, ntēkwēyiit.*

(tape ref. 44A:7-38)

♩ = 132 NB: places marked with * have a conflict of text between more than one singer. TC = Eb

Solo woman Resp.

Ōō n- tēē - kwē - yiit ēē aa, kaa-ng'a-laal mēē ruu-nēēt wōybaa-baay, n-  
Oh the leg jingles are talking, my father,

Solo

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē, ōō n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo, ōō  
the leg jingles, my mother, the leg jingles my mother,

♩ = 88 Resp.

ēē n - tēē - kwē - yiit ōō ēē kēēb koo - nēē tul - wo tuuy wōy baa - baay, n-  
oh the leg jingles, we come from a mountain which is dark, my father,

♩ = 126 Solo

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē wōy ēē, n - tēē - kwē - yiit Chee - see - kuut, ōō  
the leg jingles, oh yes, Cheeseekuut's leg jingles,

♩ = 104 Response

wēē n - tēē - kwē - yiit ōō wēē kēēb koo - nēē Ma - ri - kiis  
the leg jingles, we come from the river Marikiis

Solo

wē moo - mo, n - tēē - kwē - yiit ēē ōy ēē n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo, ōy ēē n  
yes mother, the leg jingles, oh the leg jingles, yes mother,

Resp. Solo Resp.

tēē - kwē - yiit ōy ēē ōy nyoo kii - rē kee - chey - ta wōy baa - baay, n-  
the leg jingles my father,

Solo ♩ = 108

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē ōō n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo, ōō ēē n  
the leg jingles, my mother,

Response

tēē - kwē - yiit ōō ēē roo - tu - nēē Chēēb - tōō - tōōn wōy moo - mo, n-  
the leg jingles, the cattle come from a cave called Chēēbtōōtōōn, my mother,



Solo

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē — oō — n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo, oō — ēē — n -  
the leg jingles, oh the leg jingles my mother,

Response

tēē - kwē - yiit oō ēē chēēb - too - too ma - riich tany, — wē moo - mo — n -  
the leg jingles, it is a narrow way for a cow to pass through, my mother,

Solo

tēē - kwē - yiit wē — oō — n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo, oō — n -  
the leg jingles, oh the leg jingles my mother,

Resp.

tēē - kwē - yiit ōy ēē wē baa - baay — kaa — ma - siit keey wē moo - mo, — n -  
the leg jingles, my father, these people who do not bathe [masiit keey], my mother,

Solo

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē — ōy ēē n - tēē - kwē - yiit Chee - see - kuut, oō — n -  
the leg jingles, Cheeseekuut's leg jingles, oh, which have a noisy mouth, oh,

Response joins *

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē, oō — keeb - koo, nēē a — tee - ng'an keet wē moo - mo — n -  
the leg jingles, we come from the land of small trees, my mother,

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē — ōy ēē n - tēē - kwē - yiit wē moo - mo — n -  
the leg jingles, oh the leg jingles my mother,

*

tēē - kwē - yiit ā — choo - ki tee - ng'an si - sim - to wē moo - mo, — n -  
the leg jingles, where the sisimto tree is at peace (tranquil) my mother,

tēē - kwē - yiit ēē — wōy ēē — n - tēē - kwē - yiit ēē  
the leg jingles, oh the leg jingles,

moo - mo. — Hi yē — (shout)  
my mother.

CD No.8 Post-circumcision, lion rite.

Ng'ētunyto.

(tape ref. 44A:39-52)

♩ = 66

TC = A

Solo male voice

Chēēb - ki - rib ēē yēē ē, ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong' yoo ēē.  
Oh person guarding, take care of our animal, ee,

Chēēb - ki - rib ēē, ō - riib kēēch ā ki - ma - se ēē, ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong' yoo ēē.  
look after the one with the mane, take care of our animal, ee,

Chēē - ki - rib ēē yēē ōō ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong' yoo ēē.  
take care of our animal, ee,

Chēēb - ki - rib ēē, ō - riib kēēch ā ki - ma - se ēē, ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong' yoo ēē.  
look after the one with the mane, take care of our animal, ee,

(cough)  
Chēēb - ki - rib ēē yēē ē, ō riib kēēch ēē tyoong' - yoo ēē.  
take care of our animal, ee,

Chēēb - ki - rib ēē, ō - riib kēēch ā kima - se ēē, ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong' ēē.  
look after the one with the mane, take care of our animal, ee,

Chēēb - ki - riib ēē, yēē ōō, ō - riib kēēch ēē tyoong'-yoo ēē.  
take care of our animal, ee.

Chēēb - - ki - rib ēē.  
Oh person guarding, ee.

CD No.9 Marriage song.

*Tyēēnwookikaab kēēsyēet, Sōōsyoo kimiirēy.*

(tape ref. 41A:162-197, CD excerpt ends at )

♩ = 83 TC = D

1st male soloist 3 2nd male soloist 5 Response

*Sōō - syoo ki - mii - rēy_ oō wōōy oō sōō - syoo oō wōōy ēē*  
A ritual stick called *sōōsyoo* (vocables)

3 Solo

*wōōy yaa - ya haa_ yē haa hōō yē haa oō sōō - syoo_ ēē sa - ku*

Response 3

*mii - rēy ēē. Wōōy ēē oō yaa - ya haa_ yē.*

3 Solo Response 3

*Sōō - syoo kib - kaa ēē, o - yē wōōy yaa - ya. Hōō_ ya haa haa yē haa, haa_sōō - syoo, ēē*  
Sōōsyoo that brings life to the home.

Solo Response 3 (shout) Solo

*ān - tō lēē_ haa_ wōōy yaa - ya haa_ Su - baay*  
I am proud of it.

Response 3

*moo - moo Te we - rer, oōy - ē wōōy yaa - ya,*  
Greet my mother for me, Tewaterer (vocables),

3 Solo

*haa_ yēē haa - ya wōōy ya haa, haa_ sōō - syoo, ēē yē*

Response 3

*Te we - rer_ o - yē wōōy yaa - ya haa_*

Solo Response 3

*ēē Kōb - sii - rō, ēē haa_ wōōy yaa - ya*  
my land Kobsiirō (vocables)

3 Solo

*haa_ wōōy ya wōōy_ ya haa, haa_ sōō - syoo_ ēē nyoo kā -*

Response 3 Solo

cho Kob - sii - ro ēē ō - yē wōōy yaa - ya haa ya su - baay Te  
Kobsiirō (vocables)

Response 3

we - rer ēē haa wōōy yaa - ya haa ya wōōy - ya

Solo

wōōy ya wōōy - ya haa sōō - syoo ēē ka yi -

Response 3 Solo

bweech mwaa - taēē wōōy ēē haa yaa - ya haa ka - yi  
The sōōsyoo has brought some anointing oil,

Response 3

bweech mwaar - ta ēē haa ōō wōōy yaa - ya haa ye wōōy ya,  
It has brought oil (vocables),

Solo

haa ye wōōy ya, haa sōō - syoo ēē sōō ki -

Response 3 Solo

mii - rēy ēē wōōy ya wōōy yaa - ya haa sōō - syoo ki -

Response 3 Solo

mii - rēy ēē wōōy ya wōōy yaa - ya haa ya ha, haa ya haa, haa sōō syoo ēē sōō ki -

Response 3 Solo

mii - rēy ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa ō - yē ōō

Response 3

Te - we - rer ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa ya wōōy ēē  
Oh Tewriter, the slender one (vocables)

Solo

haa ye wōōy ya, haa sōō - syoo ēē woong' - yoo  
there is the oil (vocables)

Response 3 Solo

mwaany - ta ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa wōōy ēē mwaay - ta ki -  
oil of the

Response

*mii - rēy ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa ya, wōōy ya*  
Sōōsyoo (vocables)

Solo

*haa ya aa haa sōō - syoo, ēē (a)boon - te*

Response

*Chōō sēēb - kaa ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa wōōy ēē, a - raab*  
who is with Joseph from home (vocables)

Response

*Kib - nōō bēy, ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa ya wōōy ya*  
son of Kibnoobey (vocables)

Solo

*haa ye wōōy ya haa sōō - syoo ēē a - boon - te*  
I am with Joseph from home

Response

*Chōō sēēb kaa ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya haa hai - ya ō - yē*

Response

*Ki - maan - ka ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya aa ya aa.*  
Oh Kimaanka (vocables)

Solo

*Wōōy ya (ō - yē) maam-be aa ti ka ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - ya mmm, hai - ya a -*

Response

*boo yē ēē, Bu - kaa ēē wōōy ēē wōōy yaa - yaa*  
I come from Bukaa, my home (vocables)

*aa wōōy ēē hai ya, aa (hai - ya) haa sōō - syoo ēē.*

CD No.11 Marriage song.  
*Tyēnwookibaab kēēsyēet, buukwo.*  
 (tape ref. 41A: 231-264, CD excerpt ends at )

♩ = 82 TC = G

Solo male voice

Buu - kwo ēē ōō wēē, buu - kwo ēē ōō wēē ōō  
 Buukwo (a broom made from a special plant, repeats many times)

5 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 — buu - kwo ēē aay buu - kwo ēē ōōy yaa - ya

9 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo a - nii nyoo ēē ōō wēēy, ōō wēē ōōy aay  
 buukwo, I am the one,

13 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 ōōy buu - kwo ēē aay buu - kwo ēē ōōy yaa - ya

17 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo, a - boo - ye ēē aay a - maa - nka - bēy aay  
 I come from the place where the water is sticky [icy, ie. high on the mountain]

21 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 yaa a maa - nka bēy. aay Ki yoo - ko root, ōōy yaa - ya  
 sticky water. When I arrive home,

25 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo nyo kaa, aay buu - kwo ēē aay  
 I the one who arrives home first,

29 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 aa, buu - kwo ēē aay ēē buu - kwo ēē ōōy yaa - ya

33 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē yyōō wēē a chēēb - nyoo kaa aay  
 the one who arrives home first,

37 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 aa, buu - kwo ēē aa aa, buu - kwo ēē ōōy yaa - ya

41 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo mu - rē - nik ēē aay mu - rē - nik ēē aay  
 buukwo, oh men, oh men,

45 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 aa a - soom lē - kēt, aay aa a soom lē - kēt, ōōy yaa - ya  
 ask for a belt, ask for a belt, dear sister,



49 Solo Resp Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo nyo aay___ buu - kwo ēē aay___  
 buukwo, our buukwo,

53 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 aa buu - kwo ēē aay ēē, buu - kwo ēē ōōy yaa - ya

57 Solo Resp Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay___ aa buu - kwo nyo aay___

61 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 aa a - rum ēē aay___ ōō wē ōōy ōōy yaa - ya  
 let me perish, yes,

65 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay___ buu - kwo ēē aay___

69 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 aa chēēb -nyoo kaa aay___ chēēb -nyoo kaa ōōy yaa - ya  
 the one who comes home first,

73 Solo Resp Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo ō - wē ōōy ōōy___ buu - kwo ēē aay___

77 Solo Resp Solo Resp  
 ōy ēē ōō___ aay___ ōōy yaa - ya ōōy yaa - ya

81 Solo Resp. Solo Resp.  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay___ Sā - bā -wōōt ēē aa___  
 Sabaot, yes,

85 Solo Resp Solo Resp.  
 — ā - boo - yē Tēē rēēm kaa aay___ Tēē rēēm kaa ēē ōōy yaa - ya  
 I come from the home of Terem, yes, of Terem,

89 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo Sā - bā -wōōt ēē aay___ chēēb -nyoo kaa aay___  
 oh Sabaot people who come home first,

93 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 aa a - nī nyoo ēē, aay___ Ki - mu - taay ēē ōōy yaa - ya  
 I am the one called Kimutaay, yes,

97 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo a - boo - yē ēē___ aay___ maan___ ka - bēy, aay___  
 I come from the place of sticky water,

101 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 — wook - yoo ko - roo - ri aay wook - yoo ki - roo - ri òòy yaa - ya  
 there they are laughing, there they laugh,

105 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay buu - kwo ēē aay

(shout: "Ng'alaal, aa, baamwooy" [my relative in marriage, the relationship tied in oil])

109 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 — buu - kwo ēē aay kee - ng'a - laal, ēē òòy yaa - ya  
 let us discuss, yes,

113 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay a buu - kwo ēē aay

117 Solo Resp. Solo (shout)* Resp  
 — ò - yē òò ēē ò - yē òò sa - ra - meek ēē òòy yaa - ya  
 the twins, yes,

121 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē wōy ēē aa buu - kwo nyo aay

125 Solo Resp  
 — wōy ēē wōy, yē - nēēt ēē koo - yē - nēēt ka - nyaa kii - yen òòy yaa - ya  
 aa let us reply in chorus, in chorus, let us respond,

129 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo òòy ēē wōy ēē aay aa buu - kwo nyo, aay

133 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 — buu - kwo ēē aa aa buu - kwo nyo, òòy yaa - ya  
 that is our buukwo, oh dear sister,

137 Solo Resp. Solo Resp  
 buu - kwo buu - kwo ēē aay buu - kwo ēē aay

141 Solo Resp Solo  
 — chēēb - nyoo kaa aay òò wōy ēē òòy yaa - ya buu - kwo!  
 the one who comes home first.

* "Kārōōt intowo" (the respected friend is officially coming), "Ak boosubeen" (as well as the less important ones who are still great friends).

# CD No.12 Twins birth purification, pit song.

## *Tyēēntaab saramEEK.* (tape ref. 38A:116-129)

This song results from a man visiting the home of two sisters. On his first visit, only one sister is at home, so he tells her he would like a relationship. Some time later, he visits again and finds the other sister there. He tries to seduce her, and this song records the sarcastic complaint of the first sister at such unfaithfulness. It is also acceptable for this song to be sung by an older man, as here.

(first beat is missing on tape)

♩ = 104 *Unsounded pulse line*

TC = D?

X X X X X X X

A(a) Solo male voice (b) B(c)

Tii - rēy tii - rēy moo - nkee sya ēē tii - rēy. Nyēē - ā ki - mā - kā -  
Jump, jump, colobus monkey, jump.

X X X (pulse remains sim. for whole song) (d)

soo :chēēb- nyoo kōōn - ti - ng'oo? Ēē tii - rēy.  
When my sister is alive, who can inherit her? Eh, jump.

A(a) (b1)

Tii - rēy tii - rēy moo - nkee sya ēē tii - rēy.  
Jump, jump, colobus monkey, jump.

B(c1) (d)

f Ā - lē so - bē :chēēb- nyoo mēē - ke - noo ēē tii - rēy.  
I say my sister is alive, so don't wait for me. Eh, jump.

A(a) (b) B(e)

Tii - rēy tii - rēy moo - nkee sya ēē tii - rēy ēē! Ng'a - lool - chí bii - ko sa -  
Jump, jump, colobus monkey, jump. Tell the people that those groups of seven, eight

(f)

ba n - koo naa - ni n - koot n - koo kuu - mii ku - kā - sē  
and ten will face a cross-road, and will turn the other way and say "jump!"

(d)

:choo ma - so - koot n - to weech keey ku - kas wo - li /kēē - lē ēē tii - rēy.

*A(a)*

*Tii - rēy tii - rēy moo - nkee sya ēē*

Jump, jump, colobus monkey, jump.

*B (c2)*

*Ki - tā - ku - so - bē :chēēbnyoo kōōn - ti :ng'oo? ēē tii - rēy.*

When our sister is still alive, who can inherit her?

*A(a)*

*Tii - rēy tii - rēy moo - nkee sya ēē tii - rēy ēē. Bas!*

Jump, jump, colobus monkey, jump. End!

CD No.14 Birth of twins, mother's confinement.

*Tyēēntaab saramēek, tuutu yaa.*

(tape ref. 44B:59-100, CD excerpt ends at | )

NB: 'tuutu yaa' has no known meaning, but is a phrase sometimes used in lullabies.

♩ = 90 Solo woman TC = D

Voice(s)

*Tuu - tu yaa tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu ēē Cheeb - keech.*  
Oh, the name of the first born twins [Cheebkeech].

Neembeyiit

Response Solo

*Tuu tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu Tuu - nkwoony.*  
The name of the second-born twin [Tuunkwoony].

Response Solo

*Tuu - tu yaa tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu kōō - taab ma - ng'waa - kēēt.*  
The house of the one with no bitter herb.

Response Solo

*Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, nto kii - ku - ng'waa :ku - rēē - swēēt.*  
Even the cactus would have been bitter.

Response Solo

*Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, nto kii - ku - ng'waa :tē - kēl - tēēt.*  
The thorny tree would have been bitter.

Response Solo

*Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, sī - wo ku - yem in - tē - rit.*  
To be enough for the genet.

Response Solo

*Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, kwo - nku yem ku - yi - sing'.*  
To be enough to satisfy your need.

Response Solo

*gliss.*

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, an - kii - yye bēē - kaab koong',  
When you drink the water from the spring,

Response Solo

*gliss.*

tuu tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, an - kii - yye ku - yi - sing'.  
may it satisfy your desire.

Response Solo

*gliss.*

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē Tuun kwoony.  
Name of the second twin [Tuunkwoony].

Response (+solo) Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē Cheeb keech.  
Name of the first twin [Cheebkeech].

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu kōō - taab kaab - sa - ram.  
The house of the twins.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu kōō taab kāāb - ng'ōō - kin.  
The house of the special kind.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē ma - ng'waa - keet.  
The house with no bitter herb.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, nto kii - ku - ng'waa :ku - rēē - swēēt.  
Even the cactus leaves would have been bitter.



Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē nto kii - ku - ng'waa :tē - kēl - tēēt.  
the thorny tree would have been bitter.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē nto /kii - kēē yēē - ng'uung' mwaay - ta.  
the oil would have been yours.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, not /kii - kēē - yē - wuung' - woong' kō - rō - sēēk.  
Sacrifices would have been made for you.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē Tuun kwooy.  
The name of the second twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē Cheeb - keech.  
Name of the first twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, an - ku - yem in - tē - rit.  
And it would be enough for the genet [small wild cat].

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, an - kii - yye bēē - kaab koong',  
And when you drink the water from the spring,

Response Solo

tuu tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, kwaan - kii - yye ku - yi - siing'.  
when you drink it, it satisfies you.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu - ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ tuu - tu wē Tuun kwoony.

Name of the second twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ tuu - tu wē Cheeb - keech.

Name of the first twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē, mā - ku nyēēng' woong' :kō - rō - sēēk.

indeed the sacrifices are yours.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē, mā - ku nyēēng' woong' ma - kwaay - ta.

indeed the oil is yours.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ tuu - tu wē Cheeb - keech.

Name of first twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ tuu - tu wē Tuun - kwoony.

Name of second twin.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ su - ku - yem in - tē - rit.

The genet would have enough.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē____ tuu - tu ēē,____ an - kii - yyee bēē - kaab koong',

If you drink water from the spring,

Response Solo

tuu tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, an - kii - yye ku - yi - sing'.  
I wish when you drink, it will satisfy you.

Response Solo

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē ma - ng'waa :keet.  
Oh the ones that are not born of a bitter tree.

Group Solo Group "Bas!"

Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē, tuu - tu wē Cheeb - keech. Tuu - tu ēē tuu - tu ēē.  
The name of the first born twin.

(sudden rall. to accommodate singer, last phrase very uncertain)

**CD No.15 Birth of twins, mother's purification.**  
*Tyēēntaab saramēek, sakayaa kōōng'uung' moomo.*  
 (tape ref. 44B:151-175, CD excerpt ends at | )

NB: twins are sometimes referred to as 'dogs', not in a derogatory sense but from the aspect of multiple births. The word 'moo' in some parts of this song is a shortened version of 'moomo' (mother), and the word 'sakayaa' has a weak third consonant and is therefore sung as two syllables. This song is addressed to Chēēmuukuurēn, a new born twin girl, and the name derives from 'a chain', referring to the link between twins.

TC = C

♩ = 134

Solo woman

Ēē, Chēē - mu - kuu - rēn sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo, ēē, ēē.  
 Chēēmuukuurēn, look for a house, my daughter, eh.

♩ = 112

Response

Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo ēē.  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

♩ = ♩

Solo Response

Ēē, kōō - taab kaab - sa - ram, ēē, sa - kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo, ēē.  
 The one who belongs to the family of twins, please look for your own home, dear.

Response

Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo ēē.  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Solo Response

Wōō - yyēē Chēē - mu - kuu - rēn, ēē, sa - kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo, ēē.  
 Oh Chēēmuukuurēn, please look for your own house, my daughter, eh.

Response

Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō ng'uung' moo mo, ēē.  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Solo Response

Yē, Chēē - muu - kuu - rēn, ēē, sa - kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mio, ēē.  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Response

Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo mo, ēē.  
 Oh Chēēmuukuurēn, please look for your own house, my daughter, eh.

Solo Response

*Yē, kōō - taab mang' - waa :keet, ēē, sa - ka - yaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 The one from the house with no bitter herb, please look for your own home, my dear one.

Solo

*Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē. Yē.*  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Response

*— kōō - taab kaab ng'ōō - kin, ēē, sa kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 The one who comes from the way of dogs [twins], look for your own home, my dear.

*Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo mo, ēē.*  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Solo Response

*Yē, kōō - taab kaab - sa - ram, ēē, sa kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 The one from the family of twins, please look for your own home, my daughter.

*Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Solo Response

*Yē, kōō - taab mang' - waa :keet, ēē, sa kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 The one from the house with no bitter herb, please look for your own house, my dear one.

*Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

Solo Response

*Yē, kōō - taab kaab ng'ōō - kin, ēē, sa kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 The one who comes from the way of dogs [twins], please look for your own home, my daughter.  
*rit. (soloist trying to end here)*

*Wōō - yyēē mu - ka - ra - ma sa -kayaa kōō - ng'uung' moo - mo, ēē.*  
 Oh dear, the beloved one, look for your own house, my dear.

CD No.17 Warriors preparing for a raid.

*Tyēenwookikaab seeteet.*

(tape ref. 47A:63-89)

TC = Db

Nonsounding

pulse line x

x

x

x

x

♩ = 120

Solo male  
A (intro.)



Kēē - boo - yēa - cheek Sā - bā - wōōt, ēē____  
We belong to the Sabaot, my friends/people.

x

x

x

x

x

x

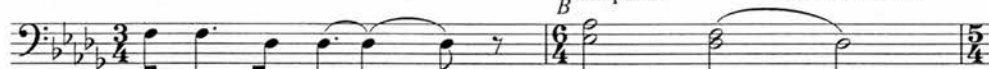
x

x

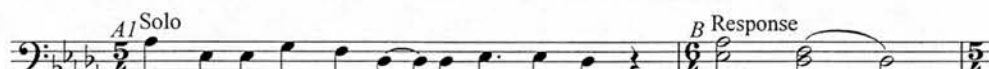
x

Response

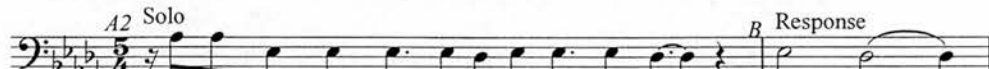
(continues sim.)



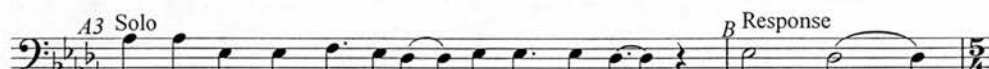
mu - rē - kyoo, ēē____ Aa, aa____  
Yes, yes.



Wō - yyēē Sā - bā - wōōt, ēē mu - rē - kyoo, ēē. Aa, aa____  
Oh Sabaot, oh men, yes. Yes, yes.



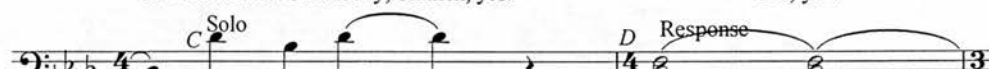
O - kay kyaam muu - tyon - ko, ēē, mu - rē - kyoo, ēē. Aa, aa____  
Let us eat slowly, oh dear men, yes. Yes, yes.



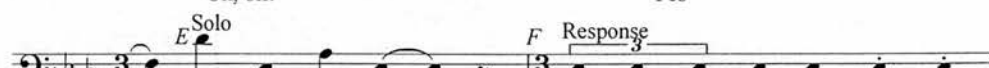
O - kany kee - ng'a - laal - se, ēē, mu - rē - kyoo, ēē. Aa, aa____  
Let us talk, yes men, yes. Yes, yes.



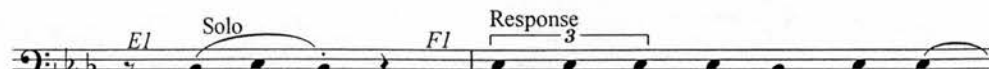
Ki - bo :boo - ryēēt ki - bo kēny ēē, mu - rē - kyoo, ēē. Aa, aa____  
The war did not start today, oh men, yes. Yes, yes.



Wō - yyē wōōt, ēē. Aa____  
Oh, oh! Yes



Wō - yyē wōōt, ēē Chēē mā - chā - mē ku - ram bēy,  
Oh, oh, yes. Those who do not like to draw water



ēē. Chēē mā - chā - mē ku - ram bēy____  
Those who do not like to draw water



— *ku - ti - nyē Ko - roor -yo, ēē.* *Ōō*  
 they have a feather [are worthless].

*A5 Solo* *B1 Response*  
*A - raab Kib - sōōy, ēē, taa - su - bay, ēē.* *Aa, aa.*  
 Son of Kibsoy, yes, I greet you, yes. Yes, yes.

*A6 Solo* *B1 Response*  
*A - raab Ki - mi - tyoos, ēē, taa - su - bay, ēē.* *Aa, aa.*  
 Son of Kimityoos, yes, I greet you, yes. Yes, yes.

*A7 Solo* *B1 Response*  
*Ā - lē chee - kwill kaat, ēē, taa - su - bay, ēē.* *Aa, aa.*  
 Even you, the stiff-necked, yes, I greet you, yes. Yes, yes.

*A8 Solo* *B1 Response*  
*A boo - yē a - nii kaab /ma - kee - ket, ēē, su - bay, ēē.* *Aa, aa.*  
 I belong to those who cannot retreat, I greet you, yes. Yes, yes.

*A9 Solo* *B1 Response*  
*A - raab Kib kuut taa - su - ba wē mu - roo - nē,* *Aa, aa.*  
 Son of Kibkut, I greet you, oh man, yes. Yes, yes.

*C1 Solo* *D Response* *E2 Solo* *F2 Response*  
*Wō - yyē wōō aa wō - yyē wōō, ēē. Chēē mā - chā-*  
 Oh, oh yes, yes, oh, oh, yes. Those who do not

*E3 (shout)*  
*mē ku - ram bēy. Aa*  
 want to draw water, yes, alas. Yes.

*F3* *D2*  
*Chēē mā - chā - mē ku - ram bēy, ku - ti - nyē ko - roor - yo. Wōōy - ēē ōō.*  
 They have a feather. Oh yes.

*Solo Response (alternates to end)*  
*Šukuur! Šukuur!(x2) Anyiny! Anyiny!(x2) Kimkim! Kimkim! (Kōōnkōy)*  
 Descent! It is sweet! Be courageous! (thank you)

CD No.18 Warrior narrative.

*Tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt, Mānyirōōr.*

(tape ref. 40A:2-245, CD excerpt ends at )

$\text{♩} = 110$  TC = E

Voice (Kisinja)

Bukantiit

chunukaasiit  
kiiraanchineek

Voice: *Tyoonkōōchēēt kāwootoowu nyēē kibo*  
*Mānyirōōr* (I am going to begin a story about  
*Mānyirōōr*).

*Ōōr, wāā-toō-wu tyoon-kōō-chēēt*  
I am beginning a story

*nyī ki-bo Mā-nyī-rōōr.* *Chōō-nēē Mā-nyī-rōōr kaab chum-be,*  
the one about Mānyirōōr. Mānyirōōr has come from the home of the British people,

*pp*

*mā - kōō - ku - chōō Mā - nyi - rōōr.*  
indeed, Mānyirōōr has come.

*Ōōr, mā - ku - chōō - nēē kaab chum - be chōōn - tooy maa - taab lā - syōōm -*  
He has come from the home of the British, he comes with the fire that explodes [gun].

*bē.* *Mā - kōō - ku - chō Mā - nyi - rōōr*  
Mānyirōōr has really come

*chōōn - tooy chēēb - lēēl kē - nē - bēēt, chōōn - tooy chēēb - lēēl kē - nē - bēēt.*  
he comes with the one wearing a white basket [hat], (x 2)

*Mā - kōō - ku - chō Mā - nyi - rōōr,*  
Indeed, Mānyirōōr has come,

*Mā - kōō - ku - buuN - ka - chi kaa ku - nyoo - woon ku - riir - toos lēē kooy, -*  
he has arrived at his home of Nkachi, therefore no more crying of the children /people.

*Bē rē wo ku - bun N - ka - chī kaa,*  
When he arrived at Nkachi,

*bē - rē wo ku - bun N - ka - chī kaa,*      *ku - nyoo - woon ku - riir - tōōs lēē - kooy.*  
when he arrived at Nkachi,      he found the children crying.

*Riir - tōōs lēē - kook kwii - mēn,*      *ān - ku - riir - tōōs ku -*  
Crying the whole day,      and crying the whole

*yeech,*      *kee - nya - liil lēē - kōōk chēēb - yōō - sōōy.*      *I - nya - lii - lē kwii - mēn*  
night,      the children are giving the women no peace.      They disturb them the

*ān - kōō - nya - lii - lē ku - yyēē ēē.*      *Cham koo - waal keey Mā - nyi - rōōr,*  
whole day and whole night.      Then Mānyirōōr asked,

*riir - chī - nē nēē lō - kō - chu?*      *Cham kēē - mwoochi ku - le mā -*  
why are the children crying?      They replied, "there is no milk".

*mī - tē chēē - ko.* *Wōy baa - baay moo -*  
*Oh, my dear father and mother.*

*mo. Chamkoo-waalkeey Mā-nyi rōōr — Anku-leā-boo-ye n-ka-niikaa Kib-chaay.*  
*Then Mānyirōōr swore. I also belong to the Kibchaay clan.*

*Kām - wooy Kib nyēē - syēt,*  
*Kibnyēēsyt said this*

*ān - ku - mwooy - chi Mā - nyi - rōōr,* *yyēē mwooy - nē kor - rōōn.*  
*to Mānyirōōr, he told him in the morning.*

Cham kōō -mu - tiis Mā - nyi - rōōr.  
Then Mānyirōōr married.

Koo mutchēēb - taab Kaa - bin - choos,  
He married a girl from the Kaabinchoos clan,  
yyēē ān - ku - mii - tēkor - rōōn,  
and one morning,

cham /keek - wa ku - le /kēē - mā - chē tuu - ka.  
the parents came demanding the cows [bride price].  
Wōōy baa - baay moo  
Oh dear father and mother.

mo. Cham koo - waal keey Mā - nyi - rōōr,  
Then Mānyirōōr vowed,  
Ō - mwōō - chi Moo - moku - rat moo  
"Tell my mother take heart",

an - ku - bal ng' - wēē - nēēt koo - yyoo - ng'ēē.  
and he dug a pit and stood in it.  
(song continues for c.40 mins. See printed text at end)

mo - yi bo kaab. Chēē - rōōr.  
as told by this calf (son/daughter) of the Chēērōōr family.





Continuing text of Mānyirōōr narrative, 40A; 2-245

*"Māchē āsēētē lukēēt, Ōlmakaanta kaanyaanyan,*

"You need to lead the warriors, you generation of Ōlmakaanta,  
*bakoonyaanyēē wōlēē bo meetaab rukōōnkē"*

to go and weep upon the death of the leader",

*kumwoochi Kibng'ēēsyēk.*

Kibng'ēēsyēk told him.

*Cham kumwoochi Kibng'ēēsyēk,*

Then Kibng'ēēsyēk also told him,

*"Mānyirōōr mākumiyoōtēch booniin, wōōy baabaay moomo".*

Mānyirōōr, the journey is not good, oh dear father and mother".

*Wokukas kuu nyoo Kibng'ēēsyēk.*

Kibng'ēēsyēk realised this.

*Kibng'ēēsyēk nyi kichōōnēē bēēlyoontēēt,*

When Kibng'ēēsyēk, the one who came on an elephant,

*cham kucho Nkachi kaa,*

came to Nkachi (home),

*nto bēē wokubun nkachi kaa, cham kunyōōr Mānyirōōr*

when he arrived at Nkachi, there he found Mānyirōōr,

*yyēē, māchē kooseet lukēēt*

yes, just about to set off with the warriors,

*māchē kukwēr lukēēt kubab Cheebuukaat*

wanting to take the warriors to Cheebuukaat.

*Kumwooy Kibng'ēēsyēk Mānyirōōr,*

Kibng'ēēsyēk said to Mānyirōōr,

*"Yoo kēēmoontē ng'aleekyuu Mānyirōōr (x 2)*

If you despise my advice Mānyirōōr,

*kanyaa āmwoowuung' ng'ālyoo.*

let me tell you something.

*Yoo kēētēbii kut ing'eet lukēēt,*  
 When you set off with the warriors,  
*kanyaa ara amwoowuung' ngālyoo.*  
 let me tell you something.  
*Yoo kēētunyēē ng'ōokit nyēē siirwoo,*  
 When you meet a white dog,  
*iweechaa lukēēt kōōyēy.*  
 please do not proceed with the warriors but turn back.  
*Cham kutooyiis Mānyirōōr,*  
 But Mānyirōōr refused to listen, saying,  
*"Bo monono seeteet nyi kōōrēēt, wōōy baabaay moomo,*  
 "This invasion is not for this world, oh father and mother,  
*bo mbono seeteet ny wōōrkooyoo,*  
 this invasion is not for the prophets,  
*bo seeteet nyi maataab motiini.*  
 this invasion is for a gun.  
*Cham koong'eet Mānyirōōr lukēēt, ānkumiitē kēēltaab too.*  
 Then Mānyirōōr set off with the warriors.  
*Cham kutunyēē ng'ōokit nyēē siirwoo.*  
 While on the way, they met a white dog.  
*Cham kuchil Mānyirōōr,*  
 Then Mānyirōōr insisted,  
*"Ārwootyinē nkanii kwēēmooy, āboontē nkanii seetaan,*  
 "I also dream at night, and I also have charms,  
*āboontē nkanii ruunkuutaab kibewiit".*  
 and I have a club of rhinoceros horn".  
*Komwooyē Kibng'ēēsyēk,*  
 Kibng'ēēsyēk said to Mānyirōōr,  
*"Mānyirōōr yoo keemoontē ng'aleekyuu, (x 2)*  
 "If you follow my advice, Mānyirōōr,  
*yoo kēēyooyyē Rokook,*  
 when you cross the river Rokook,  
*yoo kēētunyēē chii ām kēēltaab too,*  
 and when you meet somebody on the way,  
*-moobar chiichoo korrōōn, wōōy baabaay ēē.*  
 then do not kill that person in the morning, oh my father, yes".  
*Kibo kēēruyo kōōtaab Mukiimba, Mukiimba chiitaab Mukoyyoo.*  
 They slept in Mukiimba's house, Mukiimba from the Mukoyyoo tribe.  
*Yyēē, ānkumiitē mutaay korrōōn, wōōy baabaay moomo,*  
 Yes, early the following morning, oh my father, my mother,  
*kukuur Mukiimba werinyii kitinyē mēēēnkēēt.*  
 Mukiimba called one of his sons who had a necklace.  
*Ām kaatit, "Iyibwoo anii baa gh'echereetaab Somoyñēn".*  
 He said, "Bring me the royal seat¹ of the Somoyñēn age-set".

¹ A 3-legged stool that is a symbol of each age-set and reserved for use on important occasions.

*Miitē murēnik kuchurēē mutabuuk, (x 2)*

The men were eating bananas for their breakfast,  
*bērē wokookōōyto Ruuriicha*

and when Ruuriicha sneaked a look,  
*kukas tuukaab Mukiimba, kookookoow kuuynook.*  
he saw the cows of Mukiimba.

*Kule wuu nee icheek tuuka.*

Their horns protruded well.

*Chuut, "Ii, ii"*

He said, "how nice those cows are!"

*Cham keetorr Mukiimba, wōōy baabaay moomo.*

Then Mukiimba was speared to death, oh my father, my mother.

*Kaakeebar chiitaab Mukoyyoo ii.*

The person from Mukoyyoo was killed.

*Cham kutuuyiit kōōet, cham koong'uurut makeetyeet, aa!*

Then night came and the hyena howled, oh!

*Choo komwooyē kibng'ēēsyēk, ānkumwooyē Mānyirōōr,*

Remember the warnings of Kibng'ēēsyēk to Mānyirōōr,

*"M'anyirōōr, youu kēēmoontē ng'aleekyuu,*

"Mānyirōōr, if you despise my advice,

*yoo keebar chii ām kēēltaab too,*

and if you kill a person on the way,

*yoo keeng'uurut makeetyeet (x 2)*

then when the hyena will howl.

*Iweechaa lukēēt kōōyēy āk yoo kang'et kiyaang'ta,*

Make the warriors turn and go back when the bow breaks,

*yoo kācholenrēkto ng'ēmng'ēēt,*

when the gazelle passes by,

*nto yoo koomoontē ng'aleekyuu.*

do not despise my advice.

*Yoo koobē kut wochoosyē,*

When you walk and become weary,

*mooyyee bēēkaab kitaweet".*

do not drink the water on a rock". [stagnant water]

*Kuba murēn ānkuchosyo,*

The men continued until they grew tired,

*Kimii wōlto Māasuuti, kimiite wolto boontēēt Sōōrōti.*

Māasuuti was among them and Sōōrōti was also among them.

*Kuyyēēsyō murēn bēēkaab kitaweet, ānkumwooyē Kibng'ēēsyēk.*

The men drank the water on the rock despite Kibng'ēēsyēk's warning.

*Kuli yoo, kooyyēē bēēkaab kitaweet,*

He had also warned them not to go down to the plains,

*-moobē kēēltaab sōōy, obe kēēltaab Mosoob.*

nor to the lowlands.

*Nto bēē wokutoobēn Mānyirōōr, tiisoontōs nkaariisye,*

When Mānyirōōr saw the calves frolicking, his men descended to the plains,

*cham kurēkto murēn kēēltaab sōōy, bēērē wokubunto murēn wusya.*

and they arrived at the Bagisu area (Uganda).

*Kurēktēē Mānyirōōr tuuka kwēēn, ākoo maataab lasyoombē.*

Mānyirōōr thrust through, splitting the flock in two with his gun.

*Kuratee keey tuuka kwēēn, cham kuloorooriis rōōriik ēē,*

He went through the cows, the heifers became wild and ran in all directions,  
*yyēē cham kōōsiiliis kiiruuk.*

yes, the bulls bellowed.

*Bēērē wokukas kuu nyoo bakaanteek,*

And when the Bagisu realised what was happening,

*cham kutooy kuu yuu. Sekem,*

they swarmed like bees. They said,

*"Kiy nee nyi kācho tuuka kwēēn.*

"What has happened in the middle of the cows?

*Kikēēbēērē ntoos makeetyeet wē baaba?*

Has the hyena attacked them, oh father?"

*Ākoo makeetyeet. Ku chiito,*

No, it was not the hyena but a person,

*bēērē keekas māku Mānyirōōr, wē moomo.*

and that person was Mānyirōōr, oh my mother.

*Kumwooksēē Mānyirōōr maata ānkubēk mootiik korreēn.*

Then Mānyirōōr shot at the Babisu with the gun until all the bullets were finished,

*cham kwiiri Mānyirōōr buuntunkiit.*

and then Mānyirōōr broke his gun.

*Nto kikibe kēēltaab sōōy.*

Those who went to the plains, they went for good (ie. they died).

*Yyēē, kibab ku ra, wokusobcho chēē kiba kēēltaab lekem kaa,*

Yes, and those who stayed in the highlands were saved,

*āwoonkooy ng'ālyoontēēt.*

those who stayed on the mountainside.

*Kimiitē boontēēt Māasuuti, kimiitē boontēēt Kisyēēro,*

As I conclude, there was Māasuuti, Kisyēēryo,

*akoo boontēētaab Cheerubuny.*

and Cheerubuny.

*King'āloolē korreēn,*

They spoke in the morning,

*kiikiiwaal keey murēni wokubootyo Ōlmakaanta kaanyaanyan.*

the men vowed, the Ōlmakaanta age-set vanished, and they were ruined (killed).

*Kiwokoonyaanyee lekemeetaab Rukōōnkō,*

They lay ruined (dead) on the hill of Rukōōnkō,

*moyi bo kaab Chēērōōr.*

as told by this son/daughter (calf) of the Chēērōōr family

CD No.21 Ploughing song.  
*Tyēenwookikaab yiisyēēt, teetaab kirēēt.*  
 (tape ref. 43A:1-54, CD excerpt ends at ||)

♩ = 103

TC = F#

Solo male voice

*Tee - taab ki - rēēt ōō wēē, tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē in lē - yyē,*  
 The grade [exotic] cow,

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē, tee - taab ki rēēt ōō_wēē tee - ta* (whistle) *Tō - bē! kōōm layin!*  
 You, the brown one! Come to the furrow!

*Tee - taab ki - rēēt ōō wēē tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē in lē - yyē,*

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē chēēb - taab chii - to a - ke baa - ba*  
 the woman who bore me, she is a *real* woman,

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ōy ēē Tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē in lē - yyē*

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē mi - yaat n - yoo tuuy moo - yēēt lē - yyē,*  
 the envious one is bad, yes.

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ōy ēē tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē in lē - yyē.* (Whistle) (Shout) *Blēēs!*  
 You light brown one!

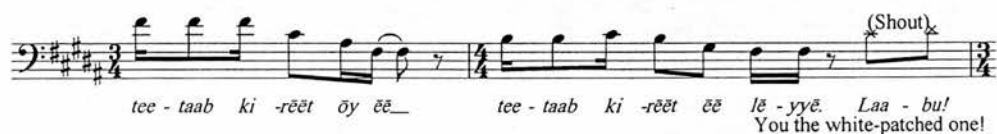
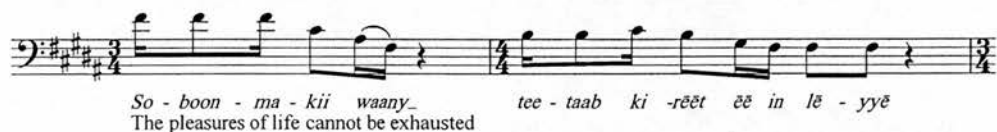
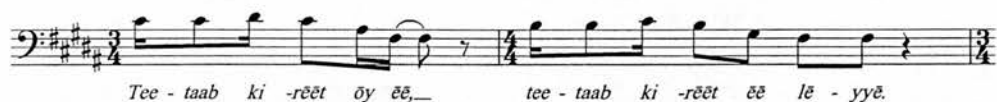
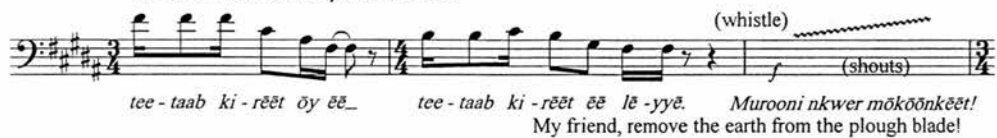
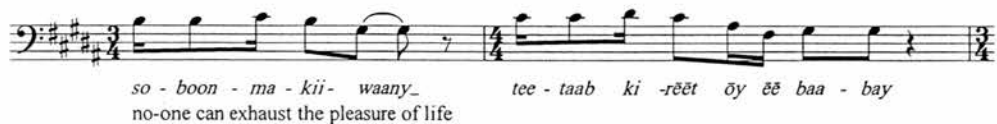
*Tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē tee - taab ki - reet ōy ēē lē - yyē,*

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ōy ēē tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē lē - yyē.*

*so - boon - ma - kii - waany chēēb - so - boon - ma - kii - waa - ny lē - yyē.*  
 no-one can exhaust the pleasures of life, the pleasures of life never end.

*Tee - taab ki - rēēt ōy ēē tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē lē - yyē,*

*tee - taab ki - rēēt ēē tee - taab ki - rēēt ōy ēē lē - yyē.*






  
*mi - yaat nyoo tuuy mōō - yēēt lē - yyē... I - rak - te āk asiis - ta lē - yyē*  
 the envious one is bad, may he set with the sun


  
*tee - taab ki -rēēt ōy ēē, tee - taab ki -rēēt ēē lē - yyē,*


  
*so - boon - ma - kii - waany_ tee - taab ki -rēēt ēē lē - yyē*  
 no-one can exhaust the pleasures of life


  
*tee - taab ki -rēēt ōy ēē, tee - taab ki -rēēt ēē lē - yyē,*


  
*tee - taab ki -rēēt ēē, so - boon - ma - kii - waany lē - yyē*  
 no-one can exhaust the pleasures of life


  
*tee - taab ki -rēēt ōy ēē tee - taab ki -rēēt ēē lē - yyē.*

# CD No.22 Lullaby.

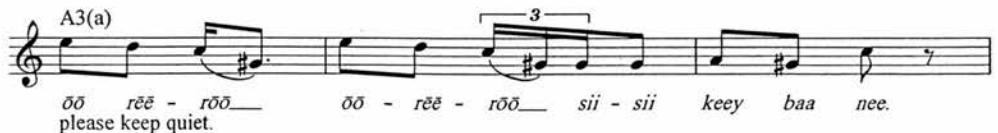
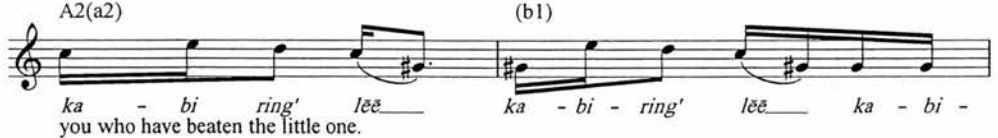
*Tyēēnto nyēē /kēēsooysooyēē keekwēēt, ōōrēērōō.*

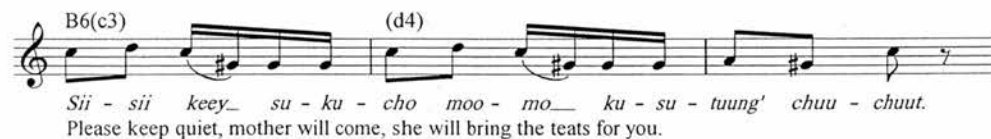
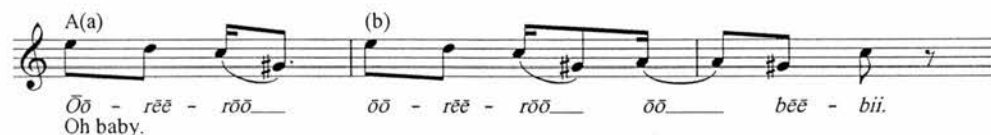
(tape ref. 41B:278-299, CD excerpt ends at { )

♩ = 85

Solo woman

TC = C






CD No.24 Children's song.  
*Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk,*  
*āmē Musuunkuuk ntooteekwaa.*  
 (tape ref. 41B:268-271)


TC = D

$\text{♩} = 138$


Voice  
 (young boy)



*Ā - mē Mu - suu - nkuuk kwa man ntoo - tee - kwaa kyoo - mē ā -*  
 The Wazungu eat, eat their bananas [but] we eat wild fruits.



*cheek mu - too - nku lēēn chēē - byoo - nkēē taab*  
 The monkey of Kaabsokwony,



*Kaab - so - kwoony ku - tē - bi ku - le nee ku - tē - bi ku - le chos!*  
 how does he sit? He sits comfortably! (chos).

CD No.25 Children's song about elopement.

*Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk, chōōrēy.*

(tape ref. 41B:271-278)

♩ = 159

TC = F

Young man  
A(a) (b) B(c)

*Chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy, maa choor ng' oo - wē chōō - rēy,*  
Theft, oh theft, whom shall I steal? (elope with). Oh theft, oh theft

(b) C(d) (b)

*chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy Chēē bēēt wē chōō - rēy, chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy.*  
It is Cheebeet, oh theft, oh theft.

B1(c1) (b)

*Chōōr - chi ng' - oo wē chōō - rēy, chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy.*  
On whose behalf shall I steal? Oh theft, oh theft.

C1(d1) (b)

*(Ki)maa - tuuy wē chōō - rēy, chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy!*  
For Kimaatuuy, oh theft, oh theft! Theft, oh theft, theft, oh theft

A(a) (b) C2(d2)

*Chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy, chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy saan - tēēt nyoo wē chōō - rēy,*  
He is the husband, oh theft,

(b1) C3(d3) (b)

*chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy nyē - bo man wē chōō - rēy chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy!*  
theft, oh theft - the true one [husband], oh theft, oh theft!

A(a) (b) C4(d4)

*Chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy maa - mā - chē wē chōō - rēy,*  
Theft, oh theft, theft, oh theft, I do not want him, oh theft,

(b) B(c) (b)

*chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy. Kaab si - ke wē chōō - rēy wē chōō - rēy.*  
theft, oh theft. His home is a place of dung, oh theft, theft, oh theft.

CD No.27 Clan praise song, 'chosen leader'.  
*Aroosyek, /kikeekwey kōōntōōwoo.*  
 (tape ref. 40A:294-340, CD excerpt ends at /)

- NB: (i) it is a compliment to compare someone to grass.  
 (ii) the last consonant in *kōōntōōwoo* is weak, hence the word sounds as if it has only 2 syllables.  
 (iii) the song is transposed a half-step higher than the recording.

$\text{♩} = 136$  TC = Eb

High male voice (Kisinja)

Bukantiit

Chuukaasiit  
Kiiraanchiinek

(both non-pitched)

Yyēē,  
Oh,

Ki mwe - mwa bōō - tā - nē,  
Mr. Kibng'weeng'wa, rippling,

bōō - tā - nē kuu suus - woo.  
rippling like grass.



Oo, yyo, wēy, yyo wēy.  
Oh, oh, yes, oh, yes.

Yyēē, Chee - saam - buut,  
Oh, Mr. Cheesaambuut,

kee nee chee - saam - buut?  
what has Cheesaambuut done?

Kēē - sā - kyi chii - to a - ke.  
You have caused problems for someone.

Yyēē...  
Yes.

Yyēē boon - tēēt kib - ng'we - ng'wa,  
Yes, honourable Kibng'weeng'wa,

ēē, chii - taab To - boos - wo.  
yes, the man from the Tobooswo family (or clan).

Chee-

saam - buut wē moo - mo,  
Oh dear Mr. Cheesaambuut,

Chee -

saam - buut wē moo - mo, ki - kee - kwey kōōn - tōōwoo.  
Mr. Cheesaambuut, oh hear me, he was chosen to lead me,

mm. mm. Ki kee-kwey kōōn-tōōwoo.  
He was chosen to lead me.

*Mā - kāā - ku - cho :Chee - saam - buut,*  
Cheesaambuut has come,

*ki - bryēn - kuut aab, Kib ng'wee - ng'wa.*  
the spokesman of Mr. Kibng'weeng'wa.

*Ki - mwoo - chi - nē kaab - kwoom - bo Kib -ng'wee - ng'wa,*  
He told the father of Kibng'weeng'wa,

*"Koōō - noo tee - ta a - raa - ba,*  
"Give me the cow, my brother/cousin,

*waa - kaa - nee koor - kēēt, ēē".*  
to pay as the bride-price for my wife, yes".

*Kā - lē cham /Kii - boor - chi mooy - ta,*  
It was said that he was given a calf,



cham ku - moon - ta :Chee saam - buut,  
 (but) Cheesaambuutbelittled the size of the animal, saying,

"Ka - kōō - no nee :ng'ee - taa - bi - ya?  
 What has my brother/cousin given me?

Ān - ku - tēē - chu :tuu - ka ām kay - ta?"  
 Are there not many cows in this home?"

Mm, Kib - ng'wee - ng'wa, Kib -  
 Yes, Kibng'weeng'wa,

ng'wee - ng'wa wē moo - mo, mm. Kib -  
 Kibng'weeng'wa, oh dear me, yes,

ng'wee - ng'wa wē moo - mo, /ki - keek - wey kōōn - tōōwoo.  
 Kibng'weeng'wa, oh dear me, he was chosen to lead.

*Ki - mwe - mwa bōō - tā - nē.*  
Kibng'weeng'wa ripples (like grass).

*Ku - le cham ku - chō muut - yo :Chee - saam - buut,*  
Then Cheesaambuut came slowly,

*cham cha - koo - ber - beer mē - sē - woo.*  
and deceived the herdsman,

*ki - mā - chē ku - kwē - rēē tee - ta yee - chey,*  
intending to take a cow in the field,

*yēē kā - tā ku - kwē - rēē siich.*  
instead of coming to the boma.



Yu kā-wo-ku-ng'eet :Kib-ng'wee-ng'wa  
 When Kibng'weeng'wa woke up,

yyēē cham ku-mwook :tee-ta si-koon-tēēt.  
 yes, the cow kicked the dung.

(song continues for  
 c.40 mins. before  
 ending as follows:)

Yu ā-woong'-tooy ā-nii ng'ā-lyoon-tēēt,  
 As I conclude these words,

ā-woong'-tooy ā-nii ng'āl-yoo,  
 finishing these words,

/ki-keek-vey kōō-tōōwoo.  
 he was chosen to lead me.



The image displays two systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs joined) and a single treble staff. The grand staves are mostly empty, with rests in the first three measures of each system. The single treble staves contain the primary melodic and harmonic content. The first system's single staff has 12 measures, and the second system's single staff has 12 measures. The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines, indicating a complex musical piece.

CD No.34 Christian song by Mang'esoy.

*Makerkeey :teng'eeek.*

(tape ref. CM 123A:169-220, CD excerpt ends at )

Parable of the Sower, or 'Soils are different'.

♩ = 108 TC = F

vocal line

bukantiit

kiiraanchiinek

Solo

Response

ki - mii - tē bēē - syēēt a - ke  
One day

ki - mii - tē bēē - wyēēt a - ke lē - yyē,  
one day, indeed,

Solo

ki - boo - nto keey :Yēē - su,  
while Jesus was

ki boo - nto keey :Yēē - su ru - bij - kyii, Ā - lē  
while Jesus was with his disciples, He was

Response (Solo)

kyoo - mchi - nē bij - ko,  
preaching to the people,

kyoo - mchi - nē bij - ko lō - kōōy - wēk ēē,  
preaching the news to the people,

kyoom - chí - nē bii - ko      Kyoom - chí - nē bii - ko lō - kōōy - wēk  
preaching to the people      preaching the news to the people

**Solo**      **Response**      **(Solo)**  
Ki - mwoo - wu ng' - a - lee - cha,      ki mwoo - wu ng' - a - lee - cha tyōōn - kōō - chēēt ēē,  
He said those words,      he said those words in parable (x 2)

**Response**      **Solo**  
ki - mwoo - wu ng' - a - lee - cha,      ki - mwoo - wu ng' - a - lee - cha tyōōn - kōō - chēēt, ku - le

**Response**  
ki - mii_ tē :kāā - bā - tiin,      ki - mii_ tē :kāā - bā - tiin lē - yyē,  
that there was a farmer,      there was a farmer,

nyēē ki_ yis n - koo - nuuk      nyēē ki - yis n - koo - nuuk m - ba - reen.  
who scattered wheat,      who scattered wheat on the farm.

Solo Response

*Kii suu_ chi :a - la - ke* *kii - suu_ chi :a - la - ke kēēl - to,*  
 Some fell some fell on the path,

*keel - taab - too_* *keel - taab - too_ lē - yyē. Ā - lē*  
 on the path, on the path.

*kwoon - chi keey ;tā - rii - tēk,* *kwoom - chi_ keey tā - rii - tēk cho -*  
 Birds ate those (x 4)

*kwoom - chi keey tā - rii - tēk* *kwoom - chi_ keey tā - rii - tēk cho - .*

*Hai - ya* *wō - yyē lē - yyē,*  
 (vocables)

CHORUS

*mm, mm* *mm, mm, mm_ Ā - lē*

ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek      ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek lē - yyē,  
 Soils are not the same (x 4)

ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek      ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek lē - yyē.

Mm - mm  
 (vocables)      mm_ mm

{ lē - yyē,      { hai - ya, hai - ya.  
 mm_ mm_

Solo  
 Ā - lē

Response

*kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke,* *kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke ki - ta - weet*  
 Some fell, some fell on the rock (x 2)

*kii suu_ chi a - la - ke,* *kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke ki - ta - weet.*

Solo Response

*Ki - bii_ tyo :choo_* *ki - bii_ tyo :choo_ le - kwer,*  
 Those grew those grew quickly (x 2)

*ki - bii tyo :choo_* *ki - bii_ tyo :choo_ le - kwer,*

Solo Response

*Yu - ka - lay :a - siia - ta,* *yu - ka_ lay :a - siia - ta lē - yyē,*  
 When the sun became hot, when the sun became hot,

*ku - sia_ yo :choo_* *ku - sia_ yo :choo_ ān - ku - bēk.*  
 they withered, they withered and died.



*Aa* (vocables) { *wō - yyē, lē - yyē,*  
*mm* *mm*

CHORUS

{i *aa*  
*mm,*
} *mm* *mm* *Ā - lē*

*ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek* *ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek lē - yyē,*  
 Soils are not the same (x 4)

Response

*ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek* *ma - ker_ keey tn - ng'eng' lē - yyē.*

*Mm* (vocables) { *wō - yyē, lē - yyē*  
*mm,* *mm*

{i *hai - ya*  
*mm,*
} *mm*

*Solo*  
*Ā - lē*

*Response*  
*kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke, kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke nta - ru - keet,*  
*Some fell, some fell among thorns (x 2)*

*kii suu_ chi a - la - ke, kii suu_ chi a - la - ke nta - ru - keet.*

*Solo*  
*Yu ka_ biit nta - ru - keet,*  
*When the thorns became big (x 2)*

*Response*  
*yu ka_ biit nta - ru - keet lē - yyē,*

*kōō - rēē - woon, choo_, kōō - rēē_ woon, choo_, lē - yyē,*  
*they choked them (x 2)*

Solo Response

ku ma_ yey a - mit, ku - ma_ yey a - mit, lē - yyē,  
so that they did not produce food (x 3)

ku - ma_ yey a - mit, ku ma_ yey a - mit, lē - yyē.

Hai - ya, mm, mm.

Wō - yyē, mm, mm.

(bukantiit makes a mistake in performance)

CHORUS Solo

Ā - lē

ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek      ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek lē - yyē,  
Soils are not the same ( x 4)

Response

ma - ker_ keey te - ng'eek      ma - ker_ keey tn - ng'eng' lē - yyē.

Mm_ (vocables)      mm, mm -

Solo

mm_      mm_ mm_ Ā - lē

Response

kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke,      kii - suu_ chi a - la - ke te - ng'eek,  
Some fell,      some fell on soil,

te - ng'eek chēē kā - roo - mēch,      te ng'eek_ chēē kā - roo - mēch lē - yyē.  
soil that is good (x 2)

**Solo** **Response**

*Ki - bii - tyo :choo, —* *ki - bii - tyo :choo, — lē - yyē,*  
Those ones grew (x 2)

*a - nku_ yey ā - miik,* *a - nku_ yey ā - miik, lē - yyē.*  
and they produced food (x 2)

**Solo** **Response**

*Nyoo yē_ bē yiit, —* *nyoo yē_ bē yiit, — ku - kas,*  
The one who listens, the one who listens, let him understand,

*nyoo yē_ bē yiit, —* *nyoo yē_ bē yiit, — ku - kas.*  
the one who listens, the one who listens, let him understand.  
(unintended rall. in response)

**Solo** **Response**

*Ku - kas ng'a - lee - chu,* *ku - kas n - g'a - lee - chu lē - yyē,*  
Hear these words (x 4)

*ku - kas n - g'a - lee - chu* *ku - kas n - g'a - lee - chu lē - yyē.*

Musical score for a piece in 3/4, 4/4, and 3/4 time signatures. The score consists of four staves. The top staff has a melody with notes and rests, marked *Mm* and *mm*. The second staff has a melody with eighth notes and rests. The third staff has a melody with notes and rests, marked *mm* and *mm.* The bottom staff has a melody with eighth notes and rests, marked *Rallentando*.



CD No.32 Sabaot church song, *Rubiichooto*.

(tape ref. 39B:163-207)

('Those Disciples' from *Tyēenwookik chēē /Kiikoostēē Yēyiin*, No. 45,  
using earlier orthography)

♩ = 116

TC = F



Nyoo ki - kii - sōō - tē ku - le chur - taat i - nee mii - sin,  
He who we take to be a blameless one,



bē syōō - syēk tu - kul ku - mii kwēē - nuu - nyooa cheek.  
is always in our midst.



Ān - kōō - bē - bēē - rēēch ku - le chur - taat i - nee mii - sin. Ā - koo i - nee ku kē - niin tēēt.  
He is a hypocrite who pretends to be righteous. However, he is the betrayer.



Nyoo ki - kii - sōō - tē ku - le chur - taat i - nee mii - sin,  
He who we take to be a blameless one,



bē syōō - syēk tu - kul ku - mii kwēē - nuu - nyooa cheek.  
is always in our midst.



Ān - kōō - bē - bēē - rēēch ku - le chur - taat i - nee mii - sin.  
He is a hypocrite who pretends to be righteous.



Ā - koo i - nee ku kē - niin - tēēt. (Ru - bii - choo - to)  
However, he is the betrayer. (Those disciples)



ru - bii - choo - to ki - too i - cheek kōō - rōō - toot keey koo nyek. (:Chii -ng'oo nee)-  
those disciples started to look at one another's faces (Who is the person)



:chii ng'oo nee nyoo - to mā - ku chaam - ta Yēē - su. (Kwēē - nuung' - waa)  
who is the person, the one who will betray Jesus? (In their midst)

Group

*kwěě - nuung' waa ki - mā - nēēn - kēt ku - le :chii ng'oo nee nyoo - to*  
in their midst they do not know who the person is who will betray Jesus.

Duo

*nyoo ma - ku - chaan - ta Yěě - su. (Ru - bii - choo - to)*  
(Those disciples)

Group

*ru - bii - choo - to ki - too.i - cheek, kōō - rōō - toot keey koo nyek (:Chii - ng'oo - nee )*  
those disciples started to look at one another's faces (Who is the person)

Solo woman

*:chii - ng'oo - nee nyoo - to mā - ku chaam - ta yěě - su (Kwěě - nuung' waa )*  
who is the person who will betray Jesus? (In their midst)

Group

*kwěě - nuung' waa ki - mā - nēēn kēt ku - le :chii ng'oo nee nyoo - to*  
in their midst they do not know who the person is who will betray Jesus.

*nyoo ma - ku - chaan - ta Yěě - su.*

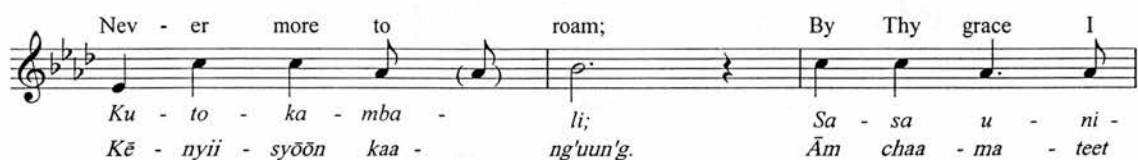
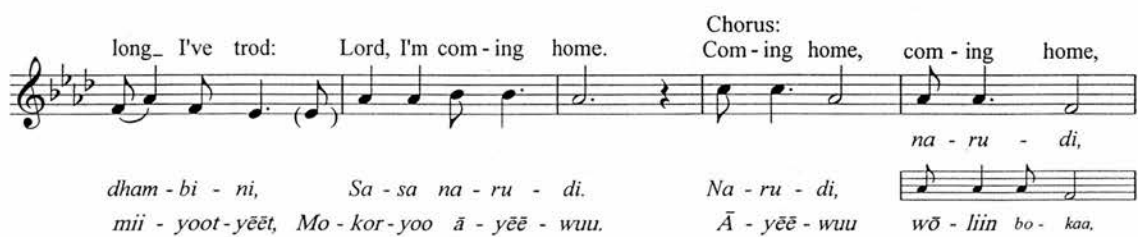
(Not on CD) Hymn: *Kiwamaasaasyāān miisin*,  
I've wandered far away from God.

NB: This is considered to be a poor Sabaot translation, source unknown, but is used, nonetheless. For example, the opening should more correctly read *kiwamaasakse anii miisin* (9 syllables instead of 7). There are also words missing, such as 'Lord' in line 4 (*Mokoryoontet*).

Verse 1:



Swahili: *Ni - me - tem - be le - a m - ba - li, Sa - sa na ru - di; Ni - li - po - te - a*  
Sabaot: *Kii - waa - maa saa - syāān mii - sin, Kun yi ā - yēē - wuu, Kii - wa wiit - keey ām*



CD No.37 Group workshop song, based on Luke 4:41  
(tape ref. 30A:35-54)

(NB: notes in brackets are minor errors in performance)

TC = F

$\text{♩} = 96$

Voice(s)

*bukantiit*

*kiiraanchiinek*

A Solo male voice

Response

B

*/Kii bē - bēē - tooy tā - mir mi - rook chēē mi yoo - tēch chēē chaang' lē - yyē.*  
The many evil spirits were chased/driven out, yes.

A Solo

C Response

*Chēē kii - yii - mē bii - ko a - lak lē - yyē.*  
They which were disturbing some people, oh yes.

A Solo

Response

B

*/Kii bē - bēē - tooy tā - mir mi - rook chēē mi yoo - tech chēē chaang' lē - yyē.*  
The many evil spirits were chased/driven out, yes,

A

C

*Chēē kii - yii - mē bii - ko a - lak lē - yyē.*  
They which were disturbing some people, oh yes.

**A** Solo **Response** **B**

Yu chu - wu - nēē :tā - mir-mi - roo - a - choo mi - yoo - tēch  
 As those evil spirits were coming out of the people, oh dear,

**D**

bii - ko, lē - yyē, ku - woo - kyi - nē ba - rak,  
 they screamed loudly,

**A** **C**

kum - woo - chi - nē. Yēē - su ku - le,  
 telling Jesus that

**E** **E1**

"I - ye - ku :i - nyiing', lē - yyē, le - kwe taab Yē - yiin! Lē - yyē!  
 "You are, yes, yes, the child of God! Oh yes!

**E2** Solo **Response** **E1**

Ōy - yēē, lē - yyē, lē - yyē, le - kwe taab Yē - yiin! Lē - yyē!  
 Oh yes, oh yes, the child of God! Oh yes!

E3 Solo Response E3

*I - ye - ku :i - nyiing', ēē ēē, le - kwe taab Yē - yiin! Lē - yyē!*  
 You are, yes, yes, the child of God! Oh yes!

E4 Solo Response E3

*Ō - yyēē, kōō - nyoo, lē - yyē, le - kwe taab Yē - yiin! Lē - yyē!*  
 Oh yes, our house, oh yes, the child of God! Oh yes!

E4 Solo Response E3

*Ō - yyēē, lē - yyē, lē - yyē, le - kwe taab Yē - yiin! Lē - yyē!"*  
 Oh yes, oh yes, the child of God! Oh yes!



CD No.38 Group workshop song, based on John 3:16  
(tape ref. 44A:312-337)

$\text{♩} = 104$  TC = E

(spoken voice enters here on 3rd time, see TEXT A)

Voice(s) Bruup!

Bukantiit (x 5)

Kiiraanchiinek  
Neembeyit

Solo male Response

*Ki - cham Yē - yiin kōō - roo - ni mīi - sin, lē - yyē, ki - cham Yē - yiin kōō - roo - ni*  
God loved this world, oh yes, God loved this world.

*hruup! hruup! hruup! hruup!*

Solo male Response

(pitch differs from bukantiit)

*Ku - kōōn la - kwa - nyii nyoo - to a - keen - ke baa - te lē - yyē ki - cham Yē - yiin kōō - roo - ni.*  
He gave his only child, oh yes, God loved this world.

(speaking, see TEXT B)

*Bruup!*



Solo male Response

*Kung'eet'hii a - ke tu - kuhyoo i - koo seekeey, lē-yyē ki cham Yē yīnkōō roo - ni.*  
 So that whoever trusts that child (NB: the words 'he will not perish' are missing),  
 oh yes, God loved this world.



(speaking, see TEXT C) (repeat x 4)

*bruup! bruup!*



Solo male voice Response

*Ntee - nee mā - ku - nyōōr so - boon - taab kib - chuu - lyo (lē - yyē) lē - yyē,*  
 But he will get/receive eternal life, oh yes, God loved this world.



Solo male voice

*ki - cham Yē - yīn kōō - roo - ni. Ntee - nee mā kunyōōr so - boon - taab*

Response (shout)

kib - chuu - lyo lē - yyē, lē - yyē, ki - cham Yē - yiin kōō - roo - ni.

Rallentando (clapping)

TEXT A:

*Lēyyē, mächē kēsuman* (yes, we want to read)  
*siruutēk Yoowaana kurkeetaab sōmōk* (the writings of John)  
*kāāyiiteetaab taman āk lo.* (chapter three, verse sixteen).  
*Lēyyē ānkookas kiyēē mächē kumwoowook ām tyēēnto* (yes, listen to what it tells you in song).

TEXT B:

*Okany kēēmwāchi Yēēsu* (Let us run to Jesus)  
*kēēmwēchi lakwaataab Yēyiin, ēē, lēyyē* (run to the son of God, yes)  
*nto kima nyooto kōōnēm keey chokooraraacheeneech* (if he did not give his life to save us from sin)  
*ng'ōōkis nto kikiikēēbēkyi rōkōs.* (we would have perished with evil).

TEXT C:

*Kaaroob cheekuuk lēyyē* (I second you, yes,)  
*kaacham chēē kēēmwaay.* (I like what you have said).  
*Nto kimāchō :Yēēsu, kōōyook* (If Jesus did not come, that is to say)  
*:Yeyiin lakwanyii akeenke kuchō* (God sending his only son to come)  
*mooyooniitēnyi bo Sābāwōōt ām lekemaaniitēnyi* (to the stomach [house] of the Sabaot on this mountain)  
*nto tulwooniitēnyi, nto kiilēēlee?* (would we have been spared?)  
*Nto kiikoowaang'teech :chēēbkooliitiik!* (The devil would have wiped us!)

(Not on CD) Group workshop song, based on John 3:16  
(tape ref. 44A:341-389)

♩. = 54 Verse 1 TC = E

Voices

Guitar melody and chords

Neembeeyit

E Asus⁴ A E B

E Asus⁴ A E B E

(one vocalist drops on repeat)

Yoo 'kee - su - man Yoo - waa - na, kur - kee - taab sō - mōk, —  
If you read John chapter three,

E Asus⁴ A E B

(one vocalist drops pitch)

kē - rēy - woon - tēē - taab ta - man āk lo, mwoo (oo)yē ku - lēēn - chi, —  
verse sixteen, it says,

E Asus⁴ A E B E

(drop in pitch occurs 1 x only)

"Ki - cham :Yē - yiin kōō - roo - ni kut ku - kōōn la - kwan - yīi a keen(ke), —  
(For) God so loved this world that he gave his one child,

E Asus⁴ A E B

*suk - ng'eet :chii nyoo i - koo - sēē keey, mēē - bē - rē mā - ku - bot.*  
 so that every person relies on that child.

E Asus⁴ A E B E

E Asus⁴ A E B E Asus⁴ A E B E

Verse 2

*Chii a - ke tu - kul nyoo i - koo - sēē keey, lak - wa - taab Yē - yiin tēēt,___*  
 (So) any person who relies on the child of God,

E Asus⁴ A E B

*nto i - nee, mā - wo - ku - nyōōr so - boon - taab kib - chuu - lyo. ___*  
 him, he will receive everlasting life".

E Asus⁴ A E B E B

Section of verse 1 repeated:

*Yoo 'kee - su - man Yoo - waa - na, kur - kee - taab sō - mōk, ___*  
 If you read John chapter three,

E Asus⁴ A E B

*kē - rēy - woon - tēē - taab ta - man āk lo, mwoo - yē ku - lēēn - chi, —*  
verse sixteen, it says,

E Asus⁴ A E B E

E Asus⁴ A E B

(ululations on 1st time through)

E Asus⁴ A E B E

# Verse 3

*Chē-mook ā-kweek, tu-kul si-kiik, chā-moo - ka-kweek āā kaa-rii-ma-nik,*  
God loves you parents, he loves you, the youth and everybody,

E Asus⁴ A E B

*ā - koo a - kweek bii - ko tu - kul, kuu - rook :Yē - yiin - tēēt.*  
(therefore) God calls each of us.

E Asus⁴ A E B E

E Asus⁴ A E B E Asus⁴ A E B E



2nd section of verse 1 repeated:

"Ki - cham :Yē - yīn kōō - roo - nī kut ku - kōōn la - kwan - yīi a keen(ke),  
(For) God so loved this world that he gave his one child,

E A A E B

suk - ng'eet :chii nyoo i - koo - sēē keey, mēē - bē - rē mā - ku - bot.  
so that every person relies on that child.

E Asus⁴ A E B E

*ritardando*

CD No.39 Group workshop song, based on Matthew 5:3-4  
(tape ref. 47A:122-134)

$\text{♩} = 96$  TC = C

**Voices (mixed)** Solo woman Resp.

*I - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, i -*  
How blessed are those,

**Neembeyiit**  
**Chnukaasiit**  
(both non-pitched)

*bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, i - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, ku - le nee*  
how blessed, how blessed are those,

*:bii - ko choo i - moong' - tēē keey Yē - yiin,* (solo)  
people who rely on God,

*+mā - kōō - wut Bāy - too - yii - syēē - taab kaab Yē - yiin* I -  
for they will enter into the Kingdom of God.

*bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, i - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, ku - le nee*  
How blessed, how blessed are those

*:bii - ko choo i - moong' - tēē keey Yē - yiin* (solo)  
people who rely on God, *+mā - kōō - wut Bāy -*

too - yī - yēē - taab kaab Yē - yīin I -  
for they will enter into the Kingdom of God.

bē ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, i - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, ku - le nee.  
How blessed, how blessed are those

:bii - ko choo mii - tē ku - riir - tōōs.  
people who are weeping,

kuu - yu +/ma - kii - bay - baay I -  
because they will be comforted.

bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, i - bē - ruu - roo - tiin, sōō, ku - le nee.  
How blessed, how blessed are those

:bii - ko choo mii - tē ku - riir - tōōs kuu - yu +/ma - kii - bay -  
people who are weeping because they will be comforted.

1. baay 2. baay Poco rall.

CD No.40 Workshop song, based on John 14:15-17  
(tape ref. 48B:122-196, CD excerpt ends at  $\text{f}$ )

NB: the first 3 lines of text are from the original traditional song, and are used here by the singer as a launching point to remind himself of the song.

$\text{♩} = 104$  [Section A] TC = Ab

Voice(s)

2 bukantiinek

Chuukaasiit

Solo male voice

$\text{Wō} - \text{yyē} \text{ Chep} - \text{so} - \text{ncho} - \text{lo} \text{ sach} \text{ maat} \text{ kooy.}$   
Chepsoncholo, make fire, oh.

$\text{Wō} - \text{yyē} \text{ Chep} - \text{so} - \text{ncho} - \text{lo} \text{ sach} \text{ maat} \text{ kooy.}$   
Chepsoncholo, make fire, oh. make fire, oh

$\text{Wō} - \text{yyē} \text{ ā} - \text{moo} - \text{tē} ; \text{ng'oo} \text{ kē} - \text{bu} - \text{toy} \text{ yyoy.}$   
He who habitually eats bats, oh.

$\text{O} \text{ kany} \text{ kēē} - \text{soom} \text{ ēē} \text{ Yē} - \text{yiin} \text{ baa} - \text{ba.}$   
Let us pray to God our father

*O kany kēē - soom ēē Yē - yiin baa - ba.*  
 Let us pray to God our father.

*Wōōy mǎā - wuu - tyēē :a - nii Yē - yiin lē - yyē.*  
 Oh dear, I will never abandon God, yes.

*Ēē a - raab Bee - ra kē - tu keey baa - ba ēēy.*  
 Yes, son of Bera, come back my son, yes.

*Ooy_ Oh* *Ooy_ Oh*

Section B: CHORALE

Group

*legato*  
Oo, — ki - tas aa  
Oh Jesus went, oh

:Yēē - su — Oo, — ku - mwoo - chi ru - bii kyii. —  
on to say to his disciples  
(bukantiinek pattern shifts sequence)

Oo, — ku - le "yoo ð - chā moo, —  
"Oh, if you love me,

Oo, — ð - riib mā - kuu - tē - kyuu".  
oh, guard my law".

Oo, — ki - tas aa :Yēē - su —  
Oh Jesus went, oh



*Oo, — ku - mwoo - chi ru - bii - kyii*  
on to say to his disciples

*Oo, — ku - le "yoo ō - chā moo, —*  
"Oh, if you love me,

*Oo, — ō - riib mā - kuu - tē kyuu —*  
oh, guard my law".

(one voice makes mistaken entry)

(speaker repeats last sung phrase)

(here I bukantiit accidentally loses the pattern in performance)

CHORALE repeats  
Group

*Lē-yyē ma - tee - bee*  
Oh yes, I will ask my father

*baa - ba* *ku kōō - no Tā - mir -*  
to give me the Holy Spirit

mir - yēēt — Yyēē mā - ku - yēēt -  
He will help me

yēē -choo— oo,— kuuwō-loo kyāā-yēy tooy—  
oh, the way he did  
(bukantinek pattern reverts to earlier sequence)

lē - yyē ma - tee - bee baa - ba—  
Oh yes, I will ask my father

ku— kōō - no Tā - mir - mir - yēēt—  
to give me the Holy Spirit

yyēē mā - ku - yēēt - yēē - cho—  
He will help me

oo— kuu wō - loo kyāā - yēy- tooy—  
oh, the way he did.

Voices speaking in background, urging  
Ng'alaalaa abayya! (Speak up my brother!)

(this section repeats ad lib. as necessary until speakers have finished)

Section A returns

Solo male voice (cough)  
Wō - yyē— wō lē - yyē  
Oh, oh, dear

*wō - yyē Chep - soon - cho - lo sach maat, ēē,*  
oh Chepsooncholo, make fire, oh,

*yyēē mā - kēē - wuut - yēē a - cheek Yē - yiin baa - ba*  
yes, God will never forget us, oh father

*Wō - yyē mā - kēē wuu - tyēē Yē - yiin, lē - yyē*  
God will never forget us, oh dear.

*o - kany kēē soom_ Yē - yiin baa - ba ēē,*  
let us pray to God, oh my father, yes,

Section B: CHORALE returns.

*yyēē, a - ra nee lō - koo - ywēk baa - ba,*  
what is the news, my father,

yyēē, a - ra nee lō - kōō - ywēk baa - ba.  
what is the news, my father,

ōō (o)kany kee - yey ng'a - lee - chaa lē - yyē.  
oh, let us do according to those words, yes.

ōō oy - yoo baa - ba, mm_  
oh, oh, my father, mm.

Group (partial)  
Ō - soo - maa - ra Tā - mir - mir - yēēt_  
Ask for the Holy Spirit

Full group  
ōō mōō - tu - rēē keey a - koo - koy_  
oh, do not always use your strength



lē - yyē mā - ku - chō kōō - rēēt ēē  
oh dear, he will come to the world, yes

yēē nyē bo :ko - ro - tiik.  
yes, by his blood.

(repeat 6 x)

Ending:  
(Sections A and B repeat here)

Ōō, Tā - mir - mir - yoo - noo  
Oh, the Holy Spirit.

(some confusion here amongst bukantinek as to where to end)



### APPENDIX III: Contents of Accompanying CD

CD No.	Category and/or song title	Date, place, performers (if known), instruments, notable features	Author's tape catalogue number.	Duration	Chapter refs.	Appendix II page no.
	<b>TRADITIONAL</b>					
1	Pre-circumcision. <i>Tyēēntaab leekook.</i>	13/12/98, Circumcision group approaching Kobiiri. <i>Filimbi</i> , vocables. Large group, mostly children.	41A:288-313 (excerpt)	1.13	8	--
2	Night before circumcision. <i>Chēēmoomo</i> , "Is the food coming now?"	22/11/99, Saboti. Solo sections sung by Maria Maiba Masai. <i>Ntēēkwēyiinēk</i> missing. Response unchanging throughout song.	48A:275-308 (excerpt)	1.09	4, 8	--
3	Night before circumcision. <i>Ōkuur chēēmoomo.</i>	24/8/99, Kapsokwony. Song is being taught by Mzee Patrick Ndege Ndiwa to participants in a song workshop. <i>Bukantiit</i> chords.	44A:82-102 (excerpt)	0.39	3, 4, 7, 8	331
4	Post-circumcision. <i>Chōōlyēēt, āryo kwēyo.</i>	14/12/98, homestead opposite Stanley Ndiema's home at Cheptoror A. <i>Mosoobiisyeēk</i> celebrating a circumcision event earlier on the same day. Many are dressed in traditional skins, most are age mates of the host, mixed sexes, very few children present and no newly circumcised. Sung whilst the large group dances in a circle. Overlapping of solo and response, uses <i>ntēēkwēyiinēk</i> and <i>bucheencheyinēk</i> , ululation and falsetto effects.	42A:1-120 (excerpt)	1.05	4, 8	333

5	Post- circumcision. <i>Sēryēēt, miyaat cheebuuy moo.</i>	14/12/98, homestead opposite Stanley Ndiema's home at Cheptoror A. Slow dignified circling dance sung by large group and soloists. No <i>ntēkwēyiinēk</i> or other instruments. Some clicks and static on recording.	42A:268-328 (excerpt)	0.54	4	--
6	Post-circumcision, leopard rite. <i>Mēliilto.</i>	14/12/98, Cheptoror A. Unaccompanied song sung by Judith Chemayek. Vocal ornamentation.	41B:324-345 (excerpt)	0.56	4, 8	336
7	Post-circumcision, leopard rite. <i>Mēliilto, ntēkwēyiit</i>	Post-circumcision, leopard rite. <i>Mēliilto.</i>	44A:7-38 (all)	1.27	4, 8	338
8	Post-circumcision, lion rite. <i>Ng'ētunyto.</i>	14/7/99, near Cheptoror. Sung by Kororio. Unaccompanied.	44A:39-52 (all)	0.40	7, 8	340
9	Marriage song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab kēēsyēet, sōōsyoo kimiirēy.</i>	12/12/98 at Cheptoror A. Solo sections sung by Joktan Naibei Tono, with inserts by Andrea Ndiwa.	41A:162-197 (excerpt)	0.53	4	341
10	Marriage song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab kēēsyēet, sēērērwo.</i>	12/12/98 at Cheptoror A. Solo's sung by Andrea Ndiwa. Used for comparison of phrases A and B.	41A:197-231 (excerpt)	1.05	7, 8	--
11	Marriage song. <i>Tyēenwookikaab kēēsyēet, buukwo.</i>	12/12/98 at Cheptoror A. Solo's sung by Joseph Kirui. Has contrast of whole and halfsteps.	41A:231-264 (excerpt)	1.12	8	344
12	Twins birth purification, pit song. <i>Tyēēntaab saramēek.</i>	22/8/97 in Kibumet village area at the home of Chemunui. Sung by Kororio, unaccompanied. Sung when jumping in the pit during purification (1st phrase is missing from recording).	38A:116-129 (all)	0.42	4, 8	347

13	Twins birth purification. <i>Tyēēntaab saramēek.</i>	22-26/11/99, Saboti. Sung by 4 <i>wazee</i> led by Isaac Kiboi Mutios, but more usually sung by a woman when taking her new-born twins out of the house for the first time. <i>Bukantiit</i> not used, <i>chuukaasiit</i> joins half way through.	47A:277-306 (excerpt)	1.43	8	--
14	Birth of twins, mother's confinement. <i>Tyēēntaab saramēek, tuutu yaa.</i>	26/8/99, Kapsokwony. Sung by relatives and visitors to the mother.	44B:59-100 (excerpt)	1.02	4, 8	349
15	Birth of twins, mother's confinement. <i>Tyēēntaab saramēek, ōmēēryēē.</i>	26/8/99, Kapsokwony. Sung by solo woman and a group of relatives.	44B:151-175 (excerpt)	0.57	8	354
16	Warrior victory song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt, wōōrintō.</i>	12/12/98, Cheptoror A. Sung by Andrea Ndiwa and his group (Joseph Kimtai Kirui, Joktan Naibei Tono, Nelson Chebriro Ngewo), no instruments. Polyphony in response. Performed whilst throwing sticks (spears) up in the air, shouts signify joy. Instruments never used.	41A:19-72 (excerpt)	1.03	4	--
17	Warriors preparing for a raid. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab seeteet.</i>	25/11/99, in Saboti. Solos sung by Andrea Ndiwa, using diatonic scale. Uncertain rendering of responses.	47A:63-89 (all)	1.34	4, 8	356
18	Warrior narrative song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lukēētaab booryēēt, Mānyirōōr.</i>	26/9/98 in Kobsiio. Sung by Kisinja (on <i>bukantiit</i> ), together with Jackson Kibsebe Masai ( <i>chuukaasiit</i> ), Wilfred Kibsamii Kabkosom ( <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> ), Kisinja's wife Mary (ululations). Instrumental introduction.	40A:2-245 (excerpt)	1.27	4, 7, 8	358

19	Warrior narrative song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lukeēetaab booryēēt, Mānyirōōr.</i>	24/9/98 in Chepyuk. Sung by Charlis Naibei Kinyokye (on <i>bukantiit</i> ) together with Masai Kokeny ( <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> ). Raining during recording. Use of rapid syllables, second voice adds questions during song.	39A:1-86 (excerpt)	1.34	8	--
20	Warrior narrative song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lukeēetaab booryēēt, Mānyirōōr.</i>	14/12/98, Kipsikorok High School. Kinyokye singing and playing <i>bukantiit</i> , also one <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> player.	41B:192-245 (excerpt)	1.50	4, 8	--
21	Ploughing song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab yiisyēēt, teetaab kurēēt.</i>	9/2/99 in Cheptais. Jackson Kibsebe Masai, unaccompanied.	43A:1-54 (excerpt)	0.42	4, 7	367
22	Lullaby. <i>Tyēēnto nyēē /kēsooysooyēē keekwēēt, ōōrēērōō.</i>	14/12/98, sung by Judith Chemayek inside Ndiema's house at Cheptoror A. Unaccompanied.	41B:278-299 (excerpt)	1.08	4, 8	370
23	Lullaby. <i>Tyēēnto nyēē /kēsooysooyēē keekwēēt, "You are small but God has created you as you are".</i>	9/2/99 in Cheptais. Sung by Hilary J.C. Tirob, learnt from his great grandmother. Sung whilst throwing a child up into the air.	43A:99-108 (all)	0.33	8	--
24	Children's song. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkōōk, āme Musuunkuuk ntooteekwaa.</i>	14/12/98, child, recorded near Kipsikorok High School.	41B:268-271 (all)	0.09	4, 8	372
25	Children's song about elopement. <i>Tyēēnwookikaab lēēkook, chōōrēy.</i>	14/12/98, Stanley Ndiema, recorded near Kipsikorok High School.	41B:271-278 (all)	0.33	4, 8	373



26	History song. <i>Chebaabaa</i> .	25/11/99 in Saboti. High starts to phrases, portamento, keening, sad, ululations.	47B:248-288 (excerpt)	1.13	4, 8	--
27	Clan praise song. <i>Aroosyek</i> , /kikeekwey kōōntōōwoo (chosen leader).	26/9/98 in Kobsi. Sung by Kisinja (on <i>bukantiit</i> ), with ntēekwēyiinēk and <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> . Much vocal variety.	40A:294-340 (excerpt)	2.31	4, 7, 8	374
<b>INSTRUMENTAL</b>						
28	Demonstration of <i>bukantiit</i> , plucking	25/4/97, Kobsi. Bernard Kipsamii.	30B:95-106 (excerpt)	0.26	3	--
29	Demonstration of <i>bukantiit</i> , strumming	25/4/97, Kobsi. Bernard Kipsamii. Contemporary chord sequence.	30B:109-113 (excerpt)	0.16	3	--
30	Pre-circumcision group. <i>Tyēēntaab leekook</i> .	13/12/98, group approaching Chewangoy, several days before circumcision. <i>Filimbi</i> appear to be in triple pulse.	41A:380-383 (excerpt)	0.13	3, 8	--
<b>CHURCH</b>						
31	Chorus.	27/1/94, Kobsi. 5 young men and 2 guitars (1 guitar on bass), SDA Church youth group. Use of harmonisation, irregular phrase lengths.	2A:74-87 (excerpt)	0.40	8	--
32	Hymn. Sabaot church song. <i>Rubiichoto</i> (Those Disciples), Church of Christ #45.	27/9/98, Chewangoy. Sung by Church of Christ congregation outdoors in rain.	39B:163-207 (verse 2)	1.19	7, 8	393
33	Chorus.	Nov 1990, location unknown but likely to be either Kapsokwony or Kobsi. Choir, guitar and vocal harmonisation.	CM 124A:89-162 (excerpt)	1.31	1	--

	MANG'ESOY					
34	Christian song. <i>Makerkeey :teng'eeek</i> (Parable of the Sower).	Dec 1990, location unknown. Mang'esoy's setting of Scripture to a traditional melody with <i>bukantiit</i> . Polyphony used in response sections.	CM 123A:169-220 (excerpt)	1.28	7, 8	382
35	Christian song from album <i>Akeenke Yēyiintēet</i> <i>Tyēenwookikaab Bukantiit</i> <i>Sabaot</i> (God is One).	Dec 1993, location unknown. Mang'esoy's setting of Scripture to a traditional melody using <i>bukantiit</i> and <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> . Mang'esoy's own son singing solos. Polyphony in responses.	CM 129A:45-194 (excerpt)	1.11	3	--
	<b>WORKSHOP SONGS</b>					
36	Composing a new song out of group text recitation (Luke 4:41), listening for suggested melody.	Kobsiwo workshop, 22/4/97. (i) group recitation to agree on stress (ii) same but intonation and rhythm now added.	30A:17-24, 26-28 (excerpts)	0.37	8	--
37	Group workshop song, based on Luke 4:41	Kobsiwo workshop, 22/4/97, with instruments added (2 <i>bukantiinek</i> and 1 <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> ).	30A:35-54 (all)	1.03	8	396
38	Group workshop song, based on John 3:16	Kapsokwony workshop, 27/8/99. 1st performance. Slows at end, and uses <i>neembeyit</i> , <i>bukantiit</i> and dancing.	44A:312-337 (all)	2.30	8	399
39	Group workshop song, based on Matthew 5:3-4	Workshop, 26/11/99, Saboti. Uses tambourine (in lieu of <i>ntēekwēyiinēk</i> ), also <i>neembeyit</i> and dance. Some polyphony in response sections, vocal calls.	47A:122-134 (all)	1.26	8	406
40	Workshop song, based on John 14:15-17	Workshop, 26/11/99, Saboti. Song by Simon Makan Masudi. Starts with 2 <i>wazee</i> on <i>bukantiit</i> , then adds <i>chuukaasiit</i> . Change of style midway (ABA), syncopation. 1st performance, hence some uncertainties during recording.	48B:122-196 (excerpt)	1.26	3, 8	408

41	Workshop song, setting of James 5:13-19, 'Let's worship our God'.	Workshop, 1/8/99, Kapsokwony. By Silas Kiprop, (on <i>bukantiit</i> ), also features <i>chuukaasiit</i> , bottle scraper, <i>neembeyit</i> , <i>kiiraanchiinek</i> and dancing. Soloists switch during song. Vocal effects include grunts during musical interludes, discussion at several points, and sections where the solo voice imitates the rapid action of the <i>bukantiit</i> . There are sustained solo sections where the singer appears uncertain about the text.	45A:364-405 (all)	4.10	8	--
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## APPENDIX IV

### Song workshops: locations, dates and statistics

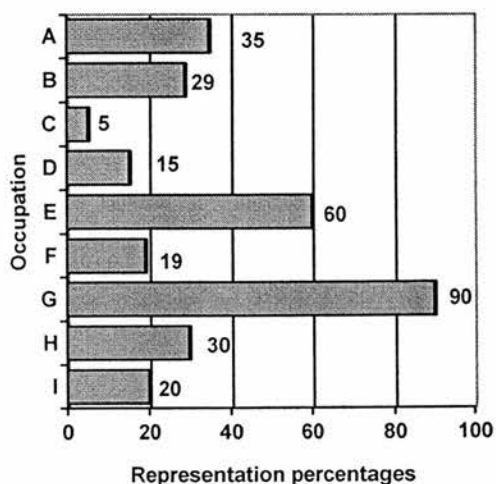
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#### *(i) Locations and dates of song workshops*

Kapsokwony	April 1994
Kobsiuro	April 1997
Kapsokwony	August 1999
Saboti	November 1999
Cheptais	January 2001

#### *(ii) Occupation ratios of those attending music workshops*

- A. Community leaders
- B. Pastors
- C. Evangelists
- D. School teachers (includes music)
- E. Church music / choir trainers
- F. Church youth leaders
- G. Lay musicians / singers
- H. Specialist traditional musicians
- I. Non musicians



#### *(iii) Denominations represented in song workshops to date*

ACK (Anglican Church of Kenya,  
formerly CPK)  
Calvary  
Christ Deliverance  
Church of Christ  
Church of God  
CPK (Church of the Province of  
Kenya)  
First Church in Kenya  
Full Gospel Church of Kenya  
Kenya Good News Church (*Kanisa  
Habari Njema*)  
Maranatha  
Missionary Fellowship

PAG (Pentecostal Assembly of God)  
PCI (Perfection Church International)  
PCK (Pentecostal Church of Kenya)  
PCMA (Protestant Church Mission of  
Africa)  
PEFA (Pentecostal Evangelical  
Fellowship of Africa)  
Reach Out  
Reformed Church of East Africa  
Roman Catholic  
Salvation Army  
SDA (Seventh Day Adventist)





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## APPENDIX V: Some Sabaot marriage customs

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As soon as a Sabaot boy or girl has completed circumcision, they are considered ready for marriage. In some cases the girl may be as young as twelve, but the men usually wait until they have acquired sufficient assets for the *koonēywēēk* (brideprice) or a small piece of land. If a man reaches the age of forty and still has no wife, his parents may then arrange a marriage for him.

Amongst highland Sabaot there are several variations in courtship. The traditional manner is for a boy to tell his parents he is ready for marriage, either leaving the choice of girl to them or discussing the options and reaching a joint consensus. The boy's mother will then leave a gift of tobacco outside the home of the chosen girl's parents, and if several young men are competing for the same girl, there will be several gifts of tobacco. The parents of the girl then consider which suitor would be best for their daughter, signifying their choice by keeping the tobacco of the acceptable suitor and returning the rest. The parents of both parties are then expected to begin *koonēywēēk* negotiations, which continue until both sides are in agreement. An alternative method of courtship is for either the suitor or a negotiator to visit the home of the bride-to-be and discuss the situation with her family, saying "I have a hoe which needs a handle".

It is still possible for a girl to be forced to marry someone chosen by her parents, but most have a say in the matter and it is acceptable for a woman to make the first move providing certain rules are complied with. For example, a man cannot marry the daughter of someone in his own age-set, take a wife from his father's age-set, or marry a woman from the family of a *Wōōrkooyoontēēt*. No-one is allowed to marry within the same clan as themselves, but when marriage occurs between two clans, other marriages between the same two clans are forbidden for at least one generation. Such rules serve to ensure the blood-lines are maintained, and also preserve time-honoured social ties. Inter-marriage is allowable between other tribes or with a non-African, but only if there is no other choice. Permission in these cases is needed from the parents and *bōrōryēēt* (clan).

The suitor's payment of *koonēywēēk* is still an expectation for all weddings, whether Christian or not, and extended family wealth is often one of the criteria

considered in choosing a suitable husband. Likewise, if a girl has been educated she is worth more. In the past, one of the prime reasons for cattle raids was to accumulate sufficient animals for *koonēywēēk* payments, but in more recent times, the suitor's father or other family members usually assist, particularly if times are hard. Payment might start with a mutually acceptable token such as a sheep or axe, and the balance completed many years later. There is no direct correlation between the amount paid and the stability of marriage, and if children are not forthcoming in the marriage, the bride's parents may demand an increase in the agreed *koonēywēēk*, believing barrenness to be the husband's fault.

On the day of a traditional marriage, the couple is given special items as a symbol of their intended union. These include a knobbed stick for the man, known as *korokto* (from the *cheeptuyeet* or *euclea divinorum* tree), which from then on will be kept in his house as a symbol of authority. The woman wears special clothes of goat skin, and carries a gourd filled with sour milk and also a frond from the *sōōsyooontēēt* palm (*dracaena reflexa*). These items symbolise her role in the home and are frequently mentioned in *sōōsyoo* songs.

Shortly before the ceremony a ram is slaughtered and the oldest grandmother and grandfather, who must have grandchildren of their own, will tie *tomookyeet* (skin rings made from the ram) on the wrists of the bride and bridegroom, along with bands of *sēērrēētuut* Kikuyu grass. A special person known as *Lubkoob* will then anoint the pair with *mwaayta* (oil, Vaseline or butter), saying "May our living *Chēēbtaab* (god) see you through to our age with a thousand and one grandchildren".¹ The *Lubkoob* or 'clean one' is an elder unrelated in any way to the two families, and must be a person of impeccable character. At the end of the marriage ceremony, the bride is escorted to her new home by a procession of women from her own family, and is received by women from her husband's family. Before the women depart, there is a joint time of singing and dancing various clan and entertainment songs.

Christian weddings are becoming increasingly popular, so much so that couples who have been traditionally married for many years are now electing to have a second wedding or 'blessing' in a church. Despite their popularity, such weddings

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¹ Source: Kipsisey interview, April 1998.

place a considerable financial burden on the couple in addition to *koonēywēēk*. For example, it is now the expectation for the bride to wear a western-style white marriage dress, and also for rings to be exchanged between the couple. The church needs to be decorated, and food must be provided for all the guests. Some churches assist by providing the rings and a cake, but there are few other concessions. Those couples that find the cost too daunting may instead choose to elope and quietly return to the church at a later date. Not all Sabaot are in agreement with church weddings, and if the parents of the couple are non-Christian, they may refuse to give their blessing to such a marriage.



## GLOSSARY

The following are definitions of terms used in the context of this study. Additional terms can be found in Tables 4a, 4c, 4d and 4e (chapter four), and those that have been used only once in the text in conjunction with an English translation are not included in this glossary.

<i>akadinda</i>	Log xylophone with 17 keys, of the Ganda people of Uganda.
<i>(a)kongo</i>	Lamellophone or 'thumb piano' of varying sizes, used by the Teso people of Uganda.
<i>amadinda</i>	Log xylophone with 12 keys, of the Ganda people of Uganda.
<i>Āmōng'ō</i> (Sab.)	A person appointed to a special role in the post-circumcision ceremony, lit. 'the friend who brings a bull'.
anemitonic	Sequence of pitched sounds with no half-steps.
<i>ānkuurwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Shrub of Mount Elgon, used as a toiletry.
<i>areet</i> ( <i>aroosyek</i> pl., Sab.)	Clan, also a category of songs that relate events of clan members.
<i>aryeembuut</i> ( <i>aryeembuunek</i> , pl., Sab.)	Side-blown curved horn of eland, roan antelope or kudu, without finger holes.
<i>asili ya muziki</i> (Swah.)	'Origin of music', used when referring to traditional music.
<i>Asiis</i> (Sab.)	Sabaot name (also found in other languages) meaning sun, used for God. Shortened from <i>Asiista</i> .
<i>Āsubēēn</i> (Sab.)	Person appointed to a special role in the post-circumcision ceremony, responsible for bringing a ewe to the ceremony.
<i>ātiintyoonik</i> (pl., Sab.)	Proverbs.
ATR	Phonological term that describes the position of the tongue root and body in the mouth cavity during the production of certain classes of sounds. Commonly written as either +ATR (advanced tongue root) or -ATR (retracted tongue root). +ATR applies to Sabaot vowels marked with a line, such as ā, ē and ō.
<i>āwunnyēk</i> (Sab.)	Arms, hands. Name used for the wooden arms extending from the resonator of a <i>bukantiit</i> to the cross-bar.
<i>āybēēriik</i> (Sab.)	'Young men', describing those circumcised in the mid-period of an age-set.
<i>āyiikaab kōōng'woong'</i> ( <i>āyiik āyiintēēt</i> , sing., Sab.)	Ancestral spirits.
<i>baaba</i> (Sab.)	Father.
<i>baabay</i> (Sab.)	Vocable commonly found in songs, may indicate surprise.
<i>Bāā mērēēng'</i> (Sab.)	Person with a special role in the post-circumcision ceremony, responsible for bringing a ram.
<i>balafon</i> (or <i>balo</i> )	Gourd-resonated frame xylophone found in much of West Africa.

<i>baraza</i> (Swah.)	Council House, but now often used to refer to community meetings led by a Chief or Council official
<i>bēēlyoontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Elephant.
<i>bēērēstēēt</i> (Sab.)	Softwood of Mount Elgon, sometimes used in construction of the <i>bukantiit</i> .
<i>beganna</i>	Large eight- to ten-string box lyre found in Sudan and Ethiopia.
<i>benga</i> (Swah.)	Kenyan band dance style that combines traditional dance rhythms, guitars, and traditional lyres such as the <i>nyatiti</i> and <i>orutu</i> .
<i>Bhurkurook</i> ( <i>bhurkuryēēt</i> , s., Sab.)	Sabaot thigh rattles worn by men.
<i>biiko</i> (Sab.)	People.
<i>binta</i> , ( <i>binuutēk</i> , pl., Sab.)	Age-set.
<i>boma</i> (Swah.)	Enclosure for keeping livestock.
<i>Bong'omeek</i> (Sab.)	Dialect of the Sabaot language. Spelling variants are <i>Bongo'mek</i> , <i>Bong'om</i> and <i>Pong'om</i> .
<i>Book</i> (Sab.)	Dialect of the Sabaot language. Spelling variants are <i>Bok</i> and <i>Pok</i> .
<i>bōōniintēēt</i> ( <i>bōōniik</i> pl., Sab.)	One who practises witchcraft.
<i>bōrōryēēt</i> ( <i>bōrōryōōsyēk</i> , pl., Sab.)	Cluster of clans.
<i>Booyikaab Kōkwēēt</i> or 'BK's' ( <i>Boontēētaab Kōkwēēt</i> , sing., Sab.)	Nickname for members of the <i>Kōkwēēt</i> .
<i>brasso</i> (Swah.)	Nickname for Kenyan military band music with jazz elements.
<i>budongo</i> ( <i>kadongo</i> , s.)	Lamellaphone of the Ganda and Soga peoples of Uganda. has a box resonator and 11 keys.
<i>bucheencheyiit</i> (s.) or <i>bucheencheyinēk</i> (pl., Sab.)	Modernised version of <i>ntēēkwēyiinēk</i> ankle rattles, made from bottle tops strung onto wires.
<i>bukantiit</i> ( <i>bukantiineek</i> pl., Sab.)	Six-stringed traditional lyre of the Sabaot people.
<i>bukantiitaab kēny</i> (Sab.)	'One of great age' or 'of long ago', describing the traditional <i>bukantiit</i> with cloth tuning wraps and bowl resonator.
<i>bukantiit nyēē</i> / <i>kookeeweechweech</i> (Sab.)	'One that is modified', describing the more recent <i>bukantiit</i> with metal tuning pegs and strings.
<i>busaa</i> (Swah.)	Fermented millet-based drink (see <i>mayyeek</i> ).
<i>but</i> (Sab.)	To pluck (the <i>bukantiit</i> ).
<i>buukwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Tree used for making brooms.
<i>buukwo</i> (Sab.)	Song title in <i>sōōsyoo</i> song set, a broom made from <i>buukwēēt</i> branches.



<i>chakacha</i> (Swah.)	Women's Swahili wedding dance loosely derived from <i>tāarab</i> .
<i>chebaabaa</i> (Sab.)	Song recounting the move of Sabaot from the moorlands, considered to be very sad.
<i>chēbotyoonkōōch</i> (pl., Sab.)	Riddles. Learning these is considered the first step towards understanding the more complicated proverbs.
<i>chēēbsookēyoontēēt</i> , ( <i>chēēbtaalamiisyek</i> , pl. or <i>chēēmutuunyoontēēt</i> , ( <i>chēēmutuunyiisyēk</i> , pl., Sab.)	Sorcerer, specialist diviner, witch doctor (consulted in cases of death, illness and sterility). Not a prophet.
<i>Chēēbkastit</i> (Sab.)	Tree used to make the <i>kuurēruunēk</i> vertical flute.
<i>Cheebkeech</i> (Sab.)	Pre-assigned name to the first-born of twins (see also <i>Chēēsiro</i> ).
<i>Cheebtaaleel</i> (Sab.)	Name sometimes given to God, meaning 'one that reflects brightness'.
<i>Chēēbto</i> (Sab.)	God in female form.
<i>Chēēbtuyeet</i> (Sab.)	Tree on Mount Elgon ( <i>Euclea divinorum</i> )
<i>cheebyoosyeet</i> (Sab.)	Old woman who is nearing the end of her life.
<i>chēēmoomo</i> (Sab.)	Song category in which relatives and visitors are exhorted to bring gifts of food and tobacco to a post-circumcision ceremony.
<i>Chēēsiro</i> (Sab.)	Pre-assigned name indicating the second-born of twins.
<i>chepkong</i>	Lyre used by the Kipsigis.
<i>chōōlyēēt</i> (Sab.)	Set of four post-circumcision songs that symbolise friendship and unity.
<i>chōōrēy</i> (Sab.)	Children's song, the meaning taken from <i>choor</i> , 'to steal'.
<i>chuukaasiit</i> ( <i>chuukaasinek</i> , pl., Sab.)	Idiophone shaker made of a small tin filled with seeds or stones, with a series of small holes punched in the metal and sometimes a wooden handle.
<i>danzi</i> (or <i>beni ngoma</i> , Swah.)	1930s dance club bands using instruments such as accordion, harmonica, guitar and string bass.
<i>dholuo</i> (Luo)	Variant of <i>benga</i> that derives from the Lake Victoria region (Luo).
<i>djembe</i> ( <i>jembe</i> )	Bowl-shaped drum with a cylindrical base, played with hands. Widespread in Mali and Guinea.
<i>El Kony</i> (Maasai)	Eye.
<i>embaire</i>	Log xylophone with 15 or 16 keys, of the Soga people in Uganda.
emic	Those behavioural patterns which comprise the inside or deeper meaning patterns of a system, and are culturally specific and based on a full spectrum of data. Generally difficult for an outsider or one with an etic perspective to predict.
<i>ennanga</i>	Arched harp of the Ganda people of Uganda, usually 8 strings but variable.
<i>endongo</i> (Luganda)	Bridge-less lyre of the Baganda people in Uganda.

etic	Behavioural perceptions that are made from an outsider's view of the system, being a cross-cultural perception based on partial data. Broadly comparative and generally the starting point for analysis.
exogamy	The practice of marrying only outside of one's own group.
'fanta'	Empty ridged glass soda bottle that is scraped with a nail, introduced to Kenya in the early 1950s by Congolese bands.
<i>filimbi</i> (Swah.)	Police whistle, usually made of metal or plastic.
<i>fundi</i> (Swah.)	One who specialises in a certain trade or craft.
generative	Term derived from mathematics, developed in linguistics to define the set of formal rules which specifies the grammatical structure of a particular language.
<i>harambee</i> (Swah.)	Concept of pulling together in community spirit, now used as the name for fund-raising events.
hemitonic	Sequence of pitched sounds in which half-steps may occur.
highlife	Name for a style of popular Congolese music derived from migrant workers of Ghana, Cameroon and Nigeria.
<i>hoteli</i> (Swah.)	Small restaurants which offer no accommodation.
<i>iloibonok</i> (pl., Maasai)	Equivalent to prophets or <i>Wōōrkooyik</i> .
<i>ineetaab teeta</i> (Sab.)	Tendons of cow-hide traditionally used for <i>bukantiit</i> strings, lit. 'rope of cow skin'.
<i>ipinda</i> (Kalenjin)	Another term for age-set or <i>binta</i> .
<i>ishirini</i> (Teso)	One-stringed tube fiddle used by the Teso people, Uganda.
<i>jembe</i> (Swah.)	Hand-held hoe.
<i>Kāālēēnchiing'</i> (Nandi)	Conversational starter meaning "I tell you".
<i>kaankacheet</i> (Sab.)	Refers to the early stages of the Sabaot men's dance, being a gentle neck undulation.
<i>kāāruumchinooyēēt</i> (Sab.)	Murmur.
<i>Kab bēēl bany</i> (Sab.)	Nickname meaning the ones who roast meat for others, given to those who are the last to be circumcised in a particular age-set period.
Kamba pop	Popular dance style of the Kamba people (Kenya), also known as 'merry-go-round'. Uses low range guitar chords beneath a second guitar on fast fill-in patterns.
<i>Kataleel</i> (Sab.)	'Place of white thorns', the name for Kitale.
<i>kayamba</i> (Swah.)	Raft rattle of Kenya. A rectangular two-sided tray made from reeds, with seeds inside. Some have a wooden strip down the centre beaten rhythmically with the thumbs whilst the instrument is shaken.
<i>kēmēsēryēēt</i> (Sab.)	Suni antelope.
<i>ketuba</i> (or <i>kitubet</i> , Nandi)	8-string bowl lyre of the Kipsigis and Nandi people of Kenya.
<i>kibēēkēryoontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Elgon teak tree.
<i>kibtiilteet</i> (also <i>kibtiiltiilyeetm</i> or <i>kibtiltēt</i> , Sab.)	Single-stringed ground harp or earth-bow played by Sabaot children.

<i>kiiraanchiinek</i> (pl., Sab.)	Idiophone comprising a wooden board and two beaters. Always accompanies the <i>bukantiit</i> .
Kikuyu pop	Popular dance style that merges Kikuyu lyrics and traditional melodies (see also Kamba pop).
<i>kiriinkēēt</i> ( <i>kiriinkoonik</i> or <i>kiriinkōōsyēk</i> , pl., Sab.)	Drum believed to have been introduced by the Bukusu, double ended, shallow depth and suspended from the player's neck by a strap. Used in churches.
<i>Kisa</i> (Sab.)	Name given to a child born after twins.
<i>kōbmōkōy</i> (Sab.)	'House of the mongoose', being another name for Koitoboss Peak.
<i>Kōkwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Council of village elders.
<i>komur bukantiit</i> (Sab.)	Term used for <i>bukantiit</i> that is being strummed, lit. 'sideways <i>bukantiit</i> '.
<i>kōnykōōny</i> (Sab.)	Style of drum playing in which the instrument is beaten with one or more sticks.
<i>koonēywēēk</i> (Sab.)	Brideprice or dowry. A material contract paid by the intended husband to the family of the bride. The size is based on the bride's perceived value (such as a first daughter, good education, good family social standing), but fulfilment of the contract may depend on her ability to procreate. It also constrains the bride in a network of social ties and contractual kin relationships.
<i>Koong'asiis</i> (Sab.)	Direction of east, lit. 'the eye of the sun'.
<i>Koony</i> (Sab.)	Dialect of Sabaot language (or <i>Kony</i> ).
<i>kōōto</i> (Sab.)	Homestead or family home area.
<i>kora</i>	21-string plucked harp-lute of West Africa, particularly the Gambia River valley, used principally to accompany narrations and recitations.
<i>korokto</i> (Sab.)	Ceremonial knobbed stick.
<i>kōrōsyōōntēēt</i> (Sab.)	Sacrifice sometimes held when crops are nearing harvest or honeycombs are ready for collecting.
<i>Kubsābiiny</i> (Sab.)	Language spoken by the Sebei on the Uganda side of Mount Elgon, closely related to the <i>Koony</i> dialect of Sabaot. Spelling variants are <i>Sabiny</i> , <i>Kupsabiny</i> and <i>Sābiiny</i> .
<i>Kulturkreis</i>	Lit. 'culture field'. German concept of culture evolution.
<i>kupiga nyusi</i> (Swah.)	Term used for strumming a stringed instrument, lit. 'hit the strings'.
<i>kureesyeet</i> (Sab.)	Cactus.
<i>kuurēruut</i> (pl. <i>kuurēruunēk</i> , also known as <i>nkarasuut</i> , Sab.)	Small vertical notched flute with three finger holes, played by uncircumcised children whilst herding cattle.
<i>kwela</i> (Izislulu)	Urban band genre popular in southern Africa during the 1950s to early 60s, also known as 'twist' or penny whistle music.
<i>lābchi</i> (Sab.)	'To be cleansed', a ritual that follows circumcision.
<i>laisser-faire</i> (Fr.)	'Leave it be', often used to indicate complacency.

language shift	Gradual or sudden move from the use of one language to another.
lexical tone	Use of pitch in speech to convey semantic (lexical) meaning.
<i>lēyyē</i> (Sab.)	Exclamation often used in songs, meaning either "please" or conveying affirmation.
<i>likembe</i>	Lamellophone or 'thumb piano' widely found in east, central and south-west Africa, having 8-12 keys.
<i>lingua franca</i> (It.)	Language chosen as a medium of communication amongst speakers of different languages.
<i>litungu</i> (or <i>iritungu</i> , Bukusu)	Bukusu and Kuria name for their eight-stringed lyre.
<i>Lubkoob</i> (Sab.)	The 'clean one', a specially chosen elder who anoints the couple during a traditional wedding ceremony.
<i>lulyoontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Softwood of Mount Elgon, sometimes used in the construction of the <i>bukantiit</i> .
<i>mabati</i> (pl., Swah.)	Galvanised iron sheets used as roofing material.
<i>mākurwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Period of rest following a burial, usually three days.
<i>Mānyirōōr</i> (Sab.)	Narrative sub-category of warrior songs, always accompanied by <i>bukantiit</i> .
<i>Masaba</i>	Bagisu name for Mount Elgon, meaning 'father of the tribe'.
<i>mashairi</i> (Swah.)	Poetry.
<i>Masop</i> ( <i>Kubsābiiny</i> )	Sebei name for Mount Elgon, being a personification of one of their ancestors.
<i>matatu</i> (Swah.)	Kenyan public transport vehicle.
<i>mayyeek</i> (Sab.)	Alcoholic drink with three ingredients (millet flour, yeast and hot water), mixed together and fermented for up to five days. Served either as a porridge-like consistency or strained to resemble milky tea, and drunk in great quantities during ceremonies and celebrations. Also known as <i>busaa</i> or 'local brew'.
<i>mbira</i>	Instrument in the lamellophone classification, common in south-east Africa and also known as the 'thumb piano'. Many variants in size, tuning and number of 'keys'. The <i>mbira</i> is the version used by the Shona people in Zimbabwe.
<i>mbisyoontēēt</i> ( <i>Kubsābiiny</i> )	Natural salt.
<i>mēliilto</i> (Sab.)	Leopard. Also the name given to a particular genre of songs sung during the Sabaot women's post-circumcision rite which refer to the leopard.
melisma	Group of notes sung to a single syllable.
metre	The rhythmic element in text, which includes the partnership of syllables with enunciation.
<i>Misri</i> (Arabic/Swahili)	Egypt.
<i>Mosoob</i> (Sab.)	Dialect of the Sabaot language. Spelling variants are <i>Māsāāb</i> , <i>Masob</i> and <i>Musob</i> .

<i>Mosoobiisyēk</i> (pl., Sab.)	Name given to those living in the upper reaches of Mount Elgon, meaning 'people from the top'.
<i>motakaa</i> (Swah.)	Car.
mother tongue	The language which a person first learns in their home environment, usually from their parents, and which is often used for conveying deep or emotive issues.
<i>Motiryooontēēt</i> (Motirēēnik, pl., Sab.)	Leader of circumcision ceremony, also a herb specialist.
<i>motoonyta</i> (Sab.)	Vulture.
murram	Clayey gravel mix used for road construction in Africa.
<i>muusyoontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Body of a dead person.
<i>mwaayta</i> (Sab.)	Oily salve, sometimes Vaseline or butter.
<i>Mzungu</i> (Swah.)	European.
<i>nderemo</i> (Kikuyu)	Portable version of the <i>kibtiilteet</i> , using a separate resonator.
<i>ndombolo</i> (Swah.)	Popular dance style characterised by acrobatic and overtly sexual moves, which has caused much controversy in Kenya.
<i>Ndorobo</i> (or <i>Dorobo</i> )	Term used to describe those of hunter-gatherer livelihood, which does not specify any ethnic group or language. Believed to have derived from the Maasai ' <i>Il Torobo</i> ' meaning 'poor people without any cattle'.
<i>neembeyit</i> (Sab.)	Small Sabaot drum associated with women's rites of post-birth purification and <i>mēliilto</i> (see Glossary entry).
<i>ng'ētunyto</i> (Sab.)	Lion. Also the name given to a particular genre of songs sung during the Sabaot men's post-circumcision rite which refer to the lion.
<i>nkach</i> (Sab.)	Third stage in the Sabaot men's dance, incorporating a wider range of body movements that include swinging of arms forwards and backwards, and a rhythmic bending of the knees to give an undulating effect.
<i>Nkiyyowāy</i> (Sab.)	Chosen mentor for a newly circumcised person.
<i>nkoburēēk</i> (Sab.)	The name given to those whose circumcision marks the start of a new age-set. Variants are <i>nkobu</i> (Uncle) or <i>ngābirēēk</i> .
<i>ntēēkwēyiinēk</i> (ntēēkwēyiit, s., Sab.)	Ankle rattles, traditional version of six metal bangles. Also the name of a song in the <i>mēliilto</i> song set that refers to these rattles.
<i>ntōōyēēnik</i> (Sab.)	Special herbs supposedly used by Sabaot women to curse or bewitch men, also a love potion.
<i>nzumari</i> (Swah.)	Oboe of the Digo (Kenya). Arabic origin, made from bamboo, shell and reed grass.
<i>nyasa</i>	Popular dance style from Malawi, based on South African beats.
<i>nyatiti</i> (Luo)	Small lyre used by the Luo.
<i>obukano</i> (Kisii)	Eight-string lyre used by the Kisii.



<i>oloiboni</i> , ( <i>iloibonok</i> , pl., Maasai)	Traditional prophet or ritual cleanser, having a similar role to a Sabaot <i>Wōōrkooyoontēēt</i> . Commonly spelt <i>laibon</i> .
<i>ōmēēryēē</i> (Sab.)	Song of rejoicing sung when newly-born twins are brought out of the mother's house for the first time.
<i>omutibo</i> (Swah.)	Kenyan acoustic guitar dance and song style that features bottle percussion.
<i>orumotit</i> (Sab.)	Hardwood tree of Mount Elgon, favoured for the arms of the <i>bukantiit</i> .
<i>parlando</i> (It.)	Vocal musical term, meaning sung as if speaking
patrilineal	The reckoning of group membership or descent through the father.
people group	Group of people with a common heritage, language and culture.
phonology	Branch of linguistics which studies the sound systems of languages, and aims to demonstrate the range and functions of distinctive sounds found in specific languages.
<i>pkan</i> (or <i>pukan</i> , Pokot)	Six-stringed lyre used by the Pokot.
<i>posho</i> (Swah.)	Name commonly given to a maize-grinding mill, but the term itself means 'daily supply of food' or rations.
<i>raan</i> (Sab.), also sometimes called <i>ancholit</i> (Sab.)	'To jump'. The climax of the Sabaot men's dance in which they jump upwards whilst keeping their legs together.
<i>raison d'être</i> (Fr.)	The reason for doing something in a certain manner.
<i>rumba</i>	Afro-Cuban 'new world' fusion of Latin and African dance idioms that rose to popularity in the 1940s.
<i>saakweetaab</i> <i>wōōnsēētāāb lēēkōōk</i> (Sab.)	Circumcision songs.
<i>Samaynēn</i> (Sab.)	Age-set category (circa 1892-1907).
<i>saramEEK</i> (Sab.)	Twins.
<i>sēērēērwo</i> (Sab.)	One of the songs in the <i>Sōōsyoo</i> marriage set, about the <i>ānkuurwēēt</i> plant.
<i>sēērērēētut</i> (Sab.)	Kikuyu grass, common to Kenya.
<i>Sēēryēēt</i> (Sab.)	Set of four songs usually sung at post-circumcision ceremonies, involving a circular dance.
<i>sērēkoonik</i> ( <i>sērēkēēt</i> , s., Sab.)	Leather skirts worn by <i>Mosoobiisyēk</i> women.
<i>shakuhachi</i> (Japn.)	Traditional bamboo flute.
<i>shamba</i> (Swah.)	Field or plot of land used for cultivation.
<i>Sheng</i> (Swah.)	Kenyan slang that combines English, Swahili, rap sounds and vernacular expressions, popular with young people.
<i>sime</i> (Swah.)	Two-edged sword, the blade broader at the distal end.
<i>siimootwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Fig tree.
<i>sirito</i> (Sab.)	Friend or colleague, used amongst members of the same age-set.
<i>sisimto</i> (Sab.)	Small shrub or tree that grows on the upper moorland area of Mount Elgon.



<i>soľfêge</i> (Fr.)	Music notation system based on tonic sol-fa.
<i>Soomëek</i> (Sab.)	Dialect of the Sabaot language. Spelling variants are <i>Somek</i> and <i>Sōōmēēk</i> .
<i>Sōōy</i> (Sab.)	Refers to the lowland region of Mount Elgon.
<i>sōōsyoo</i> (Sab.)	Set of four songs sung at a traditional Sabaot marriage, but now used for many entertainment events.
<i>sōōsyooontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Palm ( <i>Dracaena reflexa</i> ), fronds of which are used in wedding ceremonies.
<i>Sōōyiisyēk</i> (Sab.)	'The people from below', referring to anyone who is lower on the mountain than the one who is speaking.
<i>sōrōōmōōk</i> (pl., Sab.)	Kidneys. Name used for the strips of cloth used to fasten <i>bukantiit</i> strings to the cross-bar.
<i>soukous</i> (Lingala)	Provocative dance style using Lingala (Uganda/ Congo) lyrics.
speech contour	The rise or fall in pitch of sound in speech, also known as intonation.
speech rhythm	Pattern of pulses resulting from the stressing of particular syllables during speech - may be irregular or regular.
syntax	Linguistic term for the study of interrelationships between elements of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequences (Crystal 1980).
Tāarab (also spelt tarabu, taarabu, tariiba and tarab. Arabic-Swah.)	Arab-influenced popular music, more recently incorporating Indian movie techniques.
tailpiece	Triangular piece of wood or metal by which strings are fastened at the base of a stringed instrument such as the <i>bukantiit</i> .
<i>teekaanteet</i> ( <i>teikik</i> , pl., Sab.)	Bamboo.
<i>teeta</i> (Sab.)	Cow.
<i>tēkēryooontēēt</i> (Sab.)	Special child such as a twin, one born by breach or after others have died.
<i>Tēryēēt</i> (Sab.)	Mountain top.
<i>tokomta</i> (Sab.)	Ceremonial hole in the ground used in ceremonies connected with birth of twins and attraction of rain.
<i>tomookyeet</i> (Sab.)	Finger rings made from the hide of a bull, signifying a special age-set bond.
<i>turaafs</i> (Sab.)	Game of draughts, moving bottle tops on a board.
<i>tuumto</i> (Sab.)	Second stage in Sabaot men's dance, when neck and shoulders begin to move more vigorously, together with a body 'ripple' from knees to neck.
<i>twolyondet</i> (s.) or <i>twolik</i> (pl.), sometimes referred to as <i>twoniki</i> (Sab.)	Sabaot shaken idiophone, being a bell rattle held either by a wooden handle or attached to the wrist with a thong.
<i>tyēēntaab saramëek</i> (Sab.)	Birth songs that celebrate twins.

<i>tyēēnto nyēē</i> <i>/kēēsooysooyēē</i> <i>keekwēēt</i> (Sab.)	Lullabies, lit. 'songs for comforting a baby'.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>kēēsyēēt</i> (Sab.)	General term for house-entering and marriage songs.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>lēēkōōk</i> (Sab.)	Young (uninitiated) people's songs. Includes play songs.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>lukēētaab booryēēt</i> (Sab.)	Battle songs of warriors.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>ng'asyaneet</i> (Sab.)	Entertainment songs.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab seeteet</i> (Sab.)	Sub-category of warrior songs, lit. 'songs that prepare raiders'.
<i>tyēēnwookikaab</i> <i>yiisyēēt</i> (Sab.)	Work songs.
<i>uhuru</i> (Swah.)	Freedom.
<i>ugali</i> (Swah.)	Porridge made of maize, millet or cassava flour.
<i>wazee</i> (pl., Swah.)	Older people.
<i>wimbi</i> (Swah.)	Porridge made from finger millet.
<i>woonokēēt</i> (Sab.)	Goat.
<i>wōōnsēētāāb leekook</i> (Sab.)	Circumcision.
<i>Wōōrintō</i> (Sab.)	Sub-category of warrior songs, lit. 'victory songs'.
<i>Wōōrkooyoontēēt</i> , <i>Wōōrkooyik</i> (pl., Sab.)	Traditional seer or prophet, one who may predict future events, often consulted during times of adversity. Lit. 'people with heads'.
<i>wōōyyē</i> (Sab.)	Vocable commonly used in songs.
<i>yēēbwo</i> (Sab.)	Sub-category of warrior songs, thought to be sung and danced by women alone.
<i>Yēēmēētaab Burkēy</i> (Sab.)	Lit. 'warm country'.
<i>yēēmōōsyēk</i> ( <i>yēēmēēt</i> <i>sing.</i> , Sab.)	Dialectical cluster areas within the Sabaot ethnic region.
<i>Yēyiintēēt</i> (Sab.)	God the creator, often shortened to <i>Yēyiin</i> .
<i>yiinēēt</i> (Sab.)	Tendons made from monkey's tails, traditionally used for <i>bukantiit</i> strings.

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### **Bibliographic abbreviations**

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<i>BJEM</i>	<i>British Journal of Ethnomusicology.</i>
<i>EM</i>	<i>Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology.</i>
<i>GEWM</i>	<i>Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol. 1 "Africa".</i> Ruth Stone (ed.). New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
<i>JIFMC</i>	<i>Journal of the International Folk Music Council</i> (now renamed <i>Yearbook of Traditional Music</i> ).
<i>JILAM</i>	<i>Journal of the International Library of African Music, entitled 'African Music'.</i>
<i>JRAI</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute.</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Music Quarterly.</i>
<i>NGDMI</i>	<i>New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments.</i> (ed. Stanley Sadie), 1984.
<i>NGDMM</i>	<i>New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musician</i> (ed. Stanley Sadie), 2nd edition, 2001.
<i>NGHEM</i>	<i>New Grove Handbooks in Ethnomusicology</i> (ed. Helen Myers, vols. 1 and 2), 1992-3. London: MacMillan Press Ltd.
<i>NOCM</i>	<i>The New Oxford Companion to Music</i> (ed. Denis Arnold).
<i>SREM</i>	<i>Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology.</i>
<i>WM</i>	<i>The World of Music: (variously) Journal of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation (Berlin); Journal of the International Institute for Traditional Music; Journal of the Department of Ethnomusicology, Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg.</i>
<i>YIFMC</i>	<i>Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council</i> (now renamed <i>Yearbook of Traditional Music</i> ).

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## DISCOGRAPHY OF SABAOT MUSIC TAPES

(i) Recordings made under the auspices of BTL by Language Recordings International (LRI). The masters are stored in BTL library, Nairobi, but the contents of each recording have not been documented by LRI. The one exception is the Song Workshop (Leonard), for which full translations are available on request.

<u>Date recorded</u>	<u>Title / Artist(s)</u>	<u>BTL Tape Catalogue No.</u>
Dec. 1990	<i>Lōkōōywēk chēē kāroomēch chēbo bukantiit Sabaot</i> (The Good News). Sung by Patrick Mang'esoy	CM 123
Not known	Sabaot Christian Choirs	CM 125
June 1993	<i>Yēēsu Kāāsoobiintēēt Sabaot, Tyēēnwookikaab Bukantiit</i> (Jesus is the Saviour). Sung by Bernard Chuma Mulunda and group	CM 128
Dec. 1993	<i>Akeenke Yēyiintēēt Tyēēnwookikaab Bukantiit Sabaot</i> (God is one). Sung by Patrick Mang'esoy and his children	CM 129
Dec. 1993	<i>Kutōrōōriit Yēyiin</i> (God be praised). Various church choirs	CM 130
Dec. 1993	<i>Yēēsu kaantooyiinteenyoo.</i> Various church choirs	CM 131(SG 4)
Dec. 1993	<i>Chōōnēētāb lekwetaab yeyin tyēēnwookikaab bukantiit.</i> Sung by Bernard Chuma Mulunda	CM 132 (SG 5)
April 1994	Song Workshop (Leonard)	--

(ii) Field recordings made by the author, and stored with SIL International in Nairobi. Detailed contents of each recording are available on request but are not given here for reasons of space.

<u>Date recorded</u>	<u>Title / Artist(s)</u>	<u>Author's Tape Catalogue No.</u>
Jan. 1994	Traditional songs sung by Kisinja, James, Bernard Chuma with <i>bukantiit</i>	01
Jan. 1994	Male church vocal group with guitars. New literacy song (Mang'esoy, Oct. 1996)	02
April 1997	New songs from Kobsiiro music workshop, mixed composers, styles and instruments	30
Aug. 1997	Traditional <i>Mosoobiisyēk</i> songs, Kobsiiro Division, Kibumet village/area. Sung by Chemunui and others	38

Sept. 1997	New songs recorded in Kobsiiro. Mixed composers, styles and instruments	CM 167
Sept. 1998	Traditional and more recent Sabaot songs (including church hymnody) in Chepyuk (Kisinja's home). Mixed artistes	39
Sept. 1998	11 traditional Sabaot songs. Sung by Kisinja, Jackson Kibsebe Masai, Wilfred Kibsamii Kabkosom and Mary	40
Dec. 1998	Traditional Sabaot songs. Mixed artistes.	41
Dec. 1998	<i>Chōōlyēēt</i> and <i>Sēēryēēt</i> post-circumcision Sabaot songs. Cheptoror A. Sung by <i>Mosoobiisyēk</i>	42
Feb. 1999	Traditional Sabaot songs. Kobsiiro Division and Cheptais. Mixed artistes	43
July 1999	Traditional Sabaot songs, also Kapsokwony song workshop near Cheptoror, Kapsokwony. Sung by Kororio and workshop participants	44
Aug. 1999	New and traditional Sabaot songs, Kapsokwony song workshop. Mixed artistes	45
Aug. 1999	Compilation of tapes 44 and 45: new songs from Kapsokwony workshop for participant's use	46
Nov. 1999	New and traditional Sabaot songs, Saboti song workshop (i). Mixed artistes	47
Nov. 1999	New and traditional Sabaot songs, Saboti song workshop (ii). Mixed artistes	48
Nov. 1999	New and traditional Sabaot songs, Saboti song workshop (iii). Mixed artistes	49
Nov. 1999	Compilation of tapes 47, 48 and 49: new songs from Saboti workshop for participant's use	50
Jan. 2001	New and traditional Sabaot songs, Cheptais song workshop	54
Jan. 2001	Compilation of tapes 54, 41 and 49 for participants of Cheptais workshop	58